

Dancing around the Well

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# Dancing around the Well

*The Circulation of Commonplaces in  
Renaissance Humanism*

*By*

Eric M. MacPhail



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## Abbreviations

- Allen      *Opus epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P.S. Allen et alia, 12 vols. (Oxford, 1906–1958). Cited by volume and page number.
- ASD      *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* (Amsterdam, 1969–). Cited by *ordo*, volume, and page number. The rhetorical treatises are in *ordo* I, the adages in II, translations from Plutarch in IV, the New Testament in VI.
- CWE      *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto, 1974–). Cited by volume and page number.
- LB      *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami opera omnia*, ed. Jean LeClerc, 10 vols. (Leiden, 1703–1706). Cited by volume, column, and column section number.
- Otto      *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer*, ed. A. Otto (Leipzig: Teubner, 1890). Cited by proverb number, 1 to 1950.

# Introduction: Dancing Around the Well

In 1575 there appeared in Florence under the patronage of the Catholic Church a new edition of Erasmus' adages, *Adagia quaecumque ad hanc diem exierunt*. This was the official expurgated edition commissioned by the Council of Trent and approved by Pope Gregory XIII to the exclusion of all other collections of adages.<sup>1</sup> With exemplary zeal, the censors have spared no pains removing everything that could offend pious ears, especially the name of Erasmus. Though it pleased the Church, this expurgated edition could not satisfy the litigious community of philological humanists. In a chapter from book twelve of his *Variae Lectiones* published in 1580, the expatriate French humanist in Rome Marc Antoine Muret declares of the new collection of adages that no work better confirms the old saying, "a big book is a big evil" (*magnus liber, magnum malum*).<sup>2</sup> For Muret, the editors may have removed all traces of heresy, but they haven't improved the scholarship; and though they have inflated the volume with a lot of superfluous material, they are guilty of some serious omissions. Among the proverbs missing from this proverbially bad book is the notorious dance around the well. The saying, to dance around the well, derives from Plutarch's *Moralia*, from the treatise or commentary *How to tell a flatterer from a friend*, which Erasmus translated into Latin. When discussing *παρρησία* or free speech, which Erasmus translates as *libera admonitio*, Plutarch warns that such practice often endangers the speaker, for to speak freely to the powerful is to dance the proverbial dance around the well (*Moralia* 68B; translated in ASD IV-2:152).

Muret explains the saying τὴν περὶ τὸ φρέαρ ὄρχησιν ὀρχεῖσθαι as a figure of imprudence and more particularly of the imprudence of satire. Appealing to the authority of Horace, Cicero, Plato, Euripides, and Plutarch, Muret deplores the imprudence of those who sacrifice friendship and security in order to indulge in some harsh witticism, even against the powerful. In standard humanist procedure, Muret derives much of his commonplace wisdom not from the authors whom he names but rather from such handy compilations as Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, Stobaeus' *Anthology*, and of course Erasmus' *Adages*, which clearly exercised a guilty fascination over its ideological critics. For instance, adage 1456 could have furnished Muret with the saying, reported by

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1 The title page bears the solemn admonition "Gregorius XIII motu proprio ita comprobavit, ut omnes Adagiorum libros, una excepta editione Manutiana, prohibeat, atque condemnet."

2 Marc Antoine Muret, *Variae lectiones* 12.16 in *Opera omnia*, ed. C.H. Frotscher, vol. 3 (Geneva, 1971) 278–79.

Cicero, that it is easier for a scholar to swallow fire than to hold back a *bon mot*. *Flammam a sapiente facilius ore in ardente opprimi quam bona dicta teneat* (*De oratore* 2.222). Erasmus quotes the saying and identifies its source while Muret paraphrases without attribution.

Moreover, Muret shares all this commonplace material with some of the most prominent vernacular writers of the French Renaissance. Joachim Du Bellay, who was one of Muret's auditors at the Collège de Boncourt in the early 1550's, had already rehearsed much of this same material in a sonnet from the *Regrets* where the poet disavows any desire to alienate friends or patrons with intemperate satire (R143) and in another where he admonishes a friend of the many hazards of satire (R141). The latter sonnet alludes to Erasmus' adage 103 *Longae regum manus* in the verse: "Et longues sont les mains des Princes et des Rois" (v. 8), in order to express the danger of offending the king. Montaigne draws from the same well in the essay "De l'incommodité de la grandeur" (III,7) where he reinterprets the danger of the satirist as the disadvantage of the king, who is deprived of the benefit of dialogue. Both Montaigne and Du Bellay take inspiration from Plutarch's problematic of friendship or flattery, which seems particularly germane to the epideictic project of the *Regrets*, in which Du Bellay wants to praise without being seen to flatter.

Muret's polemical use of Plutarch's proverb against Erasmus culminates in an involuntary tribute to the *Adages*. After assailing Erasmus for his "fatuous interpretations" and defective theology, Muret writes a Latin commentary on Plutarch's adage clearly modeled on Erasmus' method of paroemiology. Erasmus summarizes his method in the adage *Herculei labores*, where he identifies three essential components of a proverb, which are its meaning, use, and source. After working through a number of similar sayings, Muret identifies the source of his saying in Plutarch, recapitulates its meaning quite literally, reminding us how ideally suited a well is for falling into, and quickly dispatches the use in the final sentence of his chapter. In the best humanist tradition, the use of language is invective, and so to explain the use of a proverb is to define in stereotypical terms the kind of people against whom it should be used. For Muret, the dance around the well can be used against those who for play or pleasure repeatedly do something to put themselves into danger.

Muret's chapter, like Erasmus' adages or Plutarch's treatises, are all known in Latin as *commentaria*, and Du Bellay similarly refers to the sonnets of the *Regrets* as "commentaires." Montaigne's essays bear a strong resemblance to humanist commentaries that has not escaped the attention of critics.<sup>3</sup> All of

3 Jean Céard, "Les transformations du genre du commentaire" in *L'automne de la Renaissance 1580-1630*, ed. Lafond and Stegmann (Paris, 1981) 101-115.



these texts participate in the same pervasive tradition of the miscellany or commonplace book, and they all share a common stock of examples, anecdotes, proverbs, and quotations. Muret shows us an example of the aggressive or agonistic circulation of commonplaces in Renaissance humanism while Du Bellay and Montaigne each practice a creative appropriation of commonplace material. Muret can be said to have isolated the paradigmatic figure of this whole process in the dance around the well, which poets, essayists and philosophers perform as they drain the common resources of the classical tradition. If Du Bellay regrets the dance of the Muses and his lost role of choreographer in the elegiac sonnets of the *Regrets*, neither he nor the others ever tire of orchestrating the dance around the well.<sup>4</sup>

It would be no doubt idle and interminable to chronicle the circulation of commonplaces in Renaissance literature, as quixotic a project as if someone were to write an anthology of footnotes. Nevertheless, I am drawn, as it were, to the very brink of the well in fascination with the incessant movement of commonplaces as they transit from reference works to literary works and back again, passing through Latin and the vernacular and revitalizing themselves as they circulate. In this circulation, what distinguishes the literary work from its sources? How do these *loci* or places move from mere lists and repertoires through more ambitious or idiosyncratic compilations to emerge finally in novels and essays and poems before reimmersing themselves in the common pool of erudition? This is the process which I propose to study in some of its most illuminating instances.

To organize this mass of material, I have employed a series of commonplace headings which are themselves metaphors for the collection, use, and dispersion of commonplaces. The seven chapter headings announce the controlling metaphors of the work: In the Beginning there was Chaos, A Gem in its Setting, Words Frozen and Thawed, Rhapsody in Prose, The Mosaic of Speech, the Universal Library, and In a Roman Mirror. The productivity of these metaphors has allowed me to compile my own commonplace book for the storage and retrieval of those places where humanists reflect on their method of study and composition and where this method helps to generate literary texts such as letters, novels, essays, and lyric poems.

The first chapter traces the humanist use of the word *silva* as a figure of chaos or primordial matter. Used interchangeably, *chaos* and *silva* are characteristically humanist metaphors for the collection of raw material and for a kind of literary composition that aspires to conserve the original potency

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4 For the dance of the Muses in *Regrets* 6 and its antecedents, see Henri Weber, *La création poétique au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle en France de Maurice Scève à Agrippa d'Aubigné* (Paris, 1955) 441.

of nature. We begin by surveying a wide range of humanist miscellanies, both in prose and in verse, in Latin and in the vernacular, by authors as diverse as Angelo Poliziano, Desiderius Erasmus, Caelius Rhodiginus, Teofilo Folengo, Pedro Mexía, and Francis Bacon. All of these authors and their texts deploy the metaphor of the *silva* in order to demonstrate an affinity for the creative energy of formless matter.

While our study begins with a metaphor for the collection of commonplaces, subsequent chapters explore metaphors for the change or use or appropriation of this raw material. The second chapter develops Erasmus' insight that proverbs, like gems, only show their true value when placed in the proper setting. For Erasmus, the most characteristic setting of proverbial wisdom is the letter, and consequently this chapter traces the circulation of commonplaces in the familiar correspondence and dedicatory epistles of Ermolao Barbaro, Angelo Poliziano, and Erasmus himself. Yet, the letter is not the only setting for adages; sonnets also make a fine setting, especially those which emulate epistolary form, such as the sonnets of Du Bellay's *Regrets*, which illustrate the poetic potential and the vivid imagery of the commonplace tradition.

Chapter three takes its inspiration from an episode of François Rabelais' *Quart Livre* where frozen words thaw out and revive the sounds of past conflicts. This process has been understood to signify the way in which frigid formulae and sententious wisdom come to life in works of imaginative fiction like Rabelais' own novels.<sup>5</sup> Taking our cue from this interpretation of "les paroles gelées," we will endeavor to show how frozen sayings, often derived from Erasmus' adages, come to life in various episodes of Rabelais' fiction.

Chapter four chronicles the fortunes of the rhapsody, from the work of the late fifteenth-century humanist Marco Antonio Sabellico to the career of Robert Burton in the early seventeenth century, passing through a wide range of Latin and vernacular texts and lingering especially over the preface to the *Theatrum humanae vitae* or *Theater of Human Life* by the Swiss medical doctor Theodor Zwinger. The noun rhapsody derives from the Greek verb *ῥάπτω*, *ῥάπτειν*, which means to sew or stitch together, and is generally used to designate a commonplace book such as Erasmus' *Apophthegmata* or, at least on one occasion, *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne*. Accordingly, chapter four traces metaphors of sewing and unraveling in humanist prose with particular attention to how Montaigne reflects on his own labor as he stitches and unstitches his essays. The predominantly pejorative nuances of the term rhapsody reveal

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5 François Rigolot, "Sémiotique de la sentence et du proverbe chez Rabelais," *Etudes Rabelaisiennes* 14 (1977) 277–286.

the complex self-consciousness of humanists engaged in their characteristic labor of circulating commonplaces. The paradigmatic figure for this process is Erasmus' adage "To reweave Penelope's web" or *Penelopes telam retexere*, itself a strand in the vast rhapsody of commonplace culture.

The next chapter traces the satiric topos of the mosaic of speech from antiquity to the Renaissance and examines its implications for the movement of commonplaces. The composite nature of mosaic appeals directly to the self-image of humanism as a painstaking recovery and rearrangement of the pieces of tradition, but when these pieces become embedded in the text as purely decorative materials, the mosaic expresses a counter esthetic to what we have described so far. In the mosaic of speech, the voices of the past lose their vitality and their historical identity and begin to solidify like stones in a pavement.

The sixth chapter studies the library as an institution, a topos, and a metaphor of Renaissance humanism. We begin with a dialogue between Seneca, Petrarch, and Montaigne on the difference between storing and appropriating knowledge and on the role of quotations in literary discourse. The next section looks at the library as a literary genre in itself, paying special attention to Konrad Gesner's *Universal Library*, which embodies the ambition of humanism to encompass the entire classical tradition within a printed book. Lastly, through our reading of a dedicatory epistle by Janus Lascaris to Piero de' Medici, we assess the importance of libraries for the theme of Renaissance or rebirth of the past.

The final chapter invokes the metaphor of speech as the mirror of the mind in order to explore the intertextual relations of Montaigne's essays and Cicero's letters. Rather than survey a broad spectrum of texts, the chapter offers what might be called a case study of the circulation of a commonplace form, the apophthegm, between a Renaissance author and a classical model who functions as a surreptitious or unacknowledged mirror of wavering loyalty amid civil strife. The figure of the mirror also raises the crucial question of how a commonplace can hope to convey a facet of the writer's personal identity.

The conclusion has two movements. First we examine the dedicatory epistle to Adriaan de Jonge's proverb collection, *Adagiorum centuriae octo cum dimidia*, which is a highly metaphorical tribute to Erasmus that allows us to recapitulate the principle figures of speech that we have encountered in the preceding chapters. Then we turn our attention to the proverbial well to examine metaphors of draining and filling as they pertain to the ambitions and anxieties of humanism. This return accentuates the circular structure of our inquiry, which does not pretend to offer any narrative closure to an inexhaustible topic. The several indices that we have drawn up on the model of a

Renaissance book will render this circularity more conspicuous as they trace the recurrence of names, places, and other topics through the course of the Renaissance.

The commonplace tradition has been well served by recent criticism both in French and in English. Much of this research inscribes itself in what Walter Ong calls “noetic history” or the history of the human psyche by focusing on “the structuring of Renaissance thought” or “Renaissance conceptions of knowledge.”<sup>6</sup> Others have chronicled the role of the commonplace book as a tool of “information management.”<sup>7</sup> Still others have examined the commonplace in relation to questions of reuse and appropriation of intellectual property.<sup>8</sup> What interests me is what might be called the verbal germination of literary texts from the seeds of commonplaces. My aim is to trace a series of filiations between sayings, anecdotes, and examples on the one hand and poems, essays, and fictions on the other and to classify these filiations according to humanist figures of speech. In this way I hope to provide what has been wanting so far in this field of study; namely, an historical poetics of the commonplace.

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6 Walter J. Ong, “Commonplace Rhapsody: Ravisius Textor, Zwinger and Shakespeare” in *Classical Influences on European Culture A.D. 1500–1700*, ed. R.R. Bolgar (Cambridge, 1976) 91–126; Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford, 1996); Neil Kenny, *The Palace of Secrets. Béroalde de Verville and Renaissance Conceptions of Knowledge* (Oxford, 1991).

7 Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know. Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven, 2010).

8 Kathy Eden, *Friends Hold All Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the Adages of Erasmus* (New Haven, 2001).

## In the Beginning there was Chaos

The edition of Erasmus' *Adages* which Muret inspected with such a critical eye in his *Variae lectiones* was supervised by his close friend and correspondent, Paolo Manuzio. Because he was so dissatisfied with the edition, Muret was unwilling to believe that his friend Manuzio had anything to do with it: "Nunc quicumque rudem illam et indigestam molem conguessit: Paulum enim Manutium fuisse, nemo mihi umquam persuaserit."<sup>1</sup> The expression which Muret uses to designate the compendium of adages, "rudis illa et indigesta moles," is in fact a quotation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, easily recognized for its prominence at the beginning of Ovid's first myth, the origin of the cosmos. In the beginning, before heaven and earth were formed, there was only chaos: "unus erat toto . . . in orbe . . . Chaos, rudis indigestaque moles" (*Metamorphoses* 1.6–7). In other words, the new edition is chaotic and should never have gone to press, despite its powerful sponsorship. This identification of the *Adages* with chaos may be another of Muret's involuntary tributes to Erasmus.

Though unappealing to Muret, chaos held an undeniable allure for Renaissance humanists and retailers of commonplace knowledge. In 1529, Joachim Fortius Ringelberg, a Flemish scholar and passing acquaintance of Erasmus though not one of his countless correspondents, published a little scientific miscellany entitled, simply, *Chaos*. Reissued with his *Opera* in 1531, this curious compilation opens with a dedicatory epistle to Pieter Gillis or Petrus Aegidius in which the author attempts a defense of chaos. If anyone should wonder that he has put together such disparate material with so little internal coherence, the author exclaims, let them remember Ovid's image of the original chaos, and he cites the verse "rudis indigestaque moles."<sup>2</sup> It is not clear how

1 Muret, *Opera omnia*, 3:279. "Now whoever put together that 'rough, unordered mass of things': for no one will ever convince me it was Paolo Manuzio. . . ."

2 Joachim Fortius Ringelberg, *Opera* (Lyon, 1531) 571. Here is the text of his epistle: In hunc libellum res varias conguessimus, titulumque fecimus Chaos, quod olim erat quaedam rerum omnium sine ulla forma confusio. Quare si quis miretur hic varia connecti, neque ea cohaerere, illi ante oculos versentur Ovidii versus:

Rudis indigestaque moles,

Nec quicquam nisi pondus iners, congestaque eodem

Non bene iunctarum discordia semina rerum. [*Metamorphoses* 1.7–9]

Speramus tamen Chaos nostrum neque inutile, neque iniucundum fore, quanquam ea luce, quam requirit communis scribendi ratio caret. Diversae etenim formae colorisque flosculi

this memory will capture our benevolence, but at least the self-designation of the work as chaos is not felt to be a deterrent to reading. Above all, *Chaos* appeals to the esthetic of variety that was so crucial to the humanist miscellany and its classical models. The flowers of the field, we are told, have grace without order and capture our attention through their variety: so, we are left to infer, will the randomly disposed contents of *Chaos* delight us with their variety. Thus chaos participates in the long tradition of natural metaphors, such as flowers, meadows, or gardens, that are routinely associated with any kind of compilation or anthology.<sup>3</sup> In the patristic tradition, Clement of Alexandria used the same range of metaphors to describe the genre of the *Stromata* and to appeal to the same esthetic of variety and spontaneity:

The various flowers strewn throughout the meadow and the trees planted in the garden are not arranged according to species: in the same way, learned authors have composed diverse collections entitled *Meadows*, *Mt. Helicons*, *Honeycombs*, *Robes*.<sup>4</sup>

More proximately, in dedicating his very first collection of adages, the *Adagiorum collectanea* of 1500, Erasmus claimed to have gathered his sayings like flowers from the various gardens of antiquity:

So I put aside my nightly labours over a more serious work and strolled through divers gardens of the classics, occupied in this lighter kind of study, and so plucked, and as it were arranged in garlands, like flowerets of every hue, all the most ancient and famous of the adages.<sup>5</sup> CWE 1:257

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sine lege per agrum sparsi nonnihil habere gratiae solent, ac varietate quadam contuentium oculos detinere. Hoc opusculum doctissime Petre, nomini tuo inscribimus, nec id sine ratione. Nam quemadmodum hic maxime varia in corpus unum coeunt, ita vix ullam artem reperiri existimo, in qua non feliciter sis versatus. Vale, Andouerpieae decimosexto Calend. Maias, Anno MDXXIX.

3 For a concise genealogy of this tradition, see David Bright, *Elaborate Disarray: The Nature of Statius' Silvae* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1980) 40–42.

4 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.2.1. For a very perceptive discussion of this and other expressions of “the charm of variety,” see Amiel Vardi, “Genre, Conventions, and Cultural Programme in Gellius’ *Noctes Atticae*” in *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius* eds. Holford-Strevens and Vardi (Oxford, 2004) 159–186.

5 “Intermissis itaque gravioris operae lucubrationibus hoc delicatioris studii genere per varios auctorum hortulos vagatus, adagiorum vetustissima quaeque maximeque insignia veluti omnigenos flosculos decerpsi et tanquam in sertum concinnavi.” *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P.S. Allen, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1906) 290. Hereafter cited as Allen.

The result of his horticultural efforts is a *sertum* or garland of verbal flowers. When he looked back at this début effort eight years later, he called his first collection a *sylvula* (Allen 1:444), which is the diminutive of *sylva*, which, like so many avenues of our inquiry, leads back to chaos.

Between *Chaos* and the *Collectanea* there lies an important intermediary in the work of Caelius Rhodiginus that was first published in Venice in 1516 with an interminable title that is usually abbreviated to *Lectiones antiquae*. In an incongruously discursive style, the title assures us that just as formerly Caesellius Vindex put together commentaries of ancient readings no longer extant, so now Caelius Rhodiginus has made up for their loss first of all by collecting the flowers of Greek and Latin in one body or mass: “in corporis unam velut molem.”<sup>6</sup> The noun *mole*s is of course Ovid’s term for chaos, but now explicitly we have a flowering chaos or an unformed mass of the flowers of speech gathered from the most disparate sources, which the title passes in leisurely review.<sup>7</sup> From all this miscellaneous reading, the title continues, several places or *loca* of the Latin language will be explained, hardly fewer than four hundred, some hitherto unmentioned and others carelessly printed.<sup>8</sup> The term which I have rendered as miscellaneous reading is “lectionis farrago,” which helps to situate Caelius Rhodiginus in a long genealogy. Juvenal uses the term *farrago* to describe his book of satires (*Saturae* 1.86) while Folly describes her speech as “tanta verborum farrago” at the end of the *Praise of Folly* (ASD IV-3:194). Before Erasmus, Angelo Poliziano used the term in the preface to his *Miscellaneorum centuria prima*, in a passage where he explains the title of his work. If his work should be considered disordered and confused, like a *silva* or a *farrago*, he is so far from complaining, that he has deliberately chosen the title of miscellanies because, like Gellius and Aelian, he is fonder of variety than order.<sup>9</sup> In this way we are led to understand that the titles *silva*, *farrago*,

6 “Sicuti antiquarum lectionum commentarios concinnarat olim vindex Ceselius: ita nunc eosdem per incuriam interceptos reparavit Lodovicus Caelius Rhodiginus, in corporis unam velut molem aggestis primum linguae utriusque floribus. . .”

7 “mox advocato ad partes Platone item, ac platonice omnibus, necnon Aristotele, ac haereseos eiusdem viris aliis, sed et theologorum plerisque, ac iureconsultorum, ut medicos taceam, et mathesis professos: . . .”

8 “ex qua velut lectionis farragine explicantur linguae latinae loca, quadringentis haud pauciora fere, vel aliis intacta, vel pensiculate parum excussa . . .”

9 “At inordinatam istam et confusaneam quasi silvam aut farraginem perhiberi, quia non tractim et continenter sed saltuatim scribimus et vellicatim, tantum abest uti doleamus, ut etiam titulum non sane alium quam miscellaneorum exquisiverimus, in quibus graecum tamen Helianum, latinum sequimur Gellium, quorum utriusque libri, varietate sunt, quam ordine blandiores.” Angelo Poliziano, *Omnia opera* (Venice, 1498; reprint Rome, 1968) A i r°.



and *miscellanea* all apply to the same genre, one in which all our authors, not excepting Muret, eagerly participate. We may recall here that Erasmus bestows on his own work both of the epithets that Poliziano aligns with miscellany, both *silva* and *farrago*, and both within the same adage. In the rambling and reflexive course of *Herculei labores*, Erasmus refers at one point to his *Adages* as “haec adagiorum rudis sylva” (ASD II-5:28) and at another as “tam varia rerum omniugarum quasi farrago” (ASD II-5:32) echoing the “quasi silva aut farrago” of Poliziano’s preface. The locution *rudis sylva* is a variant of Ovid’s *rudis moles*, the epithet which Muret used against the 1575 expurgated edition of the *Adages*. Erasmus, it seems, was quite far from complaining should we wish to call his work a chaos.

The etymology that we have been tracing back from Muret to Ringelberg, Caelius Rhodiginus, and Erasmus leads us at one further remove to Angelo Poliziano’s inaugural course of lectures at the Studio Fiorentino in the 1480 to 1481 academic year. We know that Poliziano delivered a course of lectures that year on the Roman poet Papinius Statius from which he derived a commentary on the *Silvae* that remained in manuscript until the 1970’s. In the beginning of his commentary, which presumably reprises the start of his lecture course, Poliziano glosses the title of Statius’ work as follows: “Inscribitur ‘Sylvarum liber’, quoniam sylva indigesta materia a philosophis appellatur, ea quam Graeci ὕλην vocant” (It’s entitled *Sylvae* because that’s what philosophers call raw matter, which the Greeks call *hyle*).<sup>10</sup> Poliziano’s spelling of *sylva* with a y seems to be contaminated by the Greek *hyle* and in turn to have influenced Erasmus’ spelling. The spellings *silva* and *sylva* alternate unpredictably in the 1498 *Opera omnia*. In any event, behind Poliziano’s definition of *silva* as *indigesta materia*, there lurks not only the poetic authority of Ovid’s primeval chaos but also the more properly philosophical authority of Chalcidius’ commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*, a Latin prose work of late antiquity that exercised an important influence on medieval thought.<sup>11</sup> To elucidate a passage from the *Timaeus* where Plato discusses the genealogy of the gods (40B), Chalcidius translates a few verses from the *Theogony*, where Hesiod initiates the genealogy of the gods with Chaos. As if the word might be unfamiliar to his audience, Chalcidius glosses it as follows: “chaos, quam Graeci *hylene*, nos silvam vocamus.”<sup>12</sup> Ignoring all other questions arising from the *Timaeus* commentary,

10 Angelo Poliziano, *Commento inedito alle Selve di Stazio*, ed. Cesarini Martinelli (Florence, 1978) 8.

11 Chalcidius was a fourth-century Christian writer.

12 *Plato Latinus*, vol. 4 *Timaeus*, ed. Waszink (London, 1962) 167.



I want simply to emphasize the equivalence of *chaos*, *hyle*, and *silva* which Chalcidius established for the Latin Middle Ages and which Poliziano seems to have imported into Renaissance humanism.

To exemplify his notion of *sylva*, Poliziano cites a few instances of how the term is used by classical authors including Marcus Varro, Quintilian, and a paradigmatic instance from Suetonius' *Lives of the Grammarians* which bears heavily on the tendencies of humanist erudition. Of the grammarian M. Valerius Probus, Suetonius remarks that, though he published very little, he left behind a not inconsiderable *silva* of observations on ancient speech, presumably a very rough draft of the kind of grammatical miscellany that Aulus Gellius produced in the *Noctes Atticae*. Suetonius' testimony is all that remains of Probus' *silva*: "reliquit autem non mediocrem silvam observationum sermonis antiqui" (*De grammaticis et rhetoribus* 24.5). Poliziano cites this use of *silva* and glosses it as follows: "materiam videlicet indigestam ac res multas temere congestas significans" (*Commento* 8). The *silva* brings together a random mass of learning that has not yet been sorted out or formed. Poliziano himself kept some sort of notebook or collection of excerpts which he entitled *Sylva* and to which he refers in his commentaries on Ovid and Persius but which has not been identified among his papers.<sup>13</sup>

When Erasmus revised the text of *Festina lente* for the 1526 edition of the *Adages*, he looked back at the earlier stages of his project and remembered having brought with him to Venice, when he arrived there in 1508 in order to collaborate with Aldo Manuzio, nothing more than the raw material of a future work. "Venetiam nihil mecum apportabam praeter confusam et indigestam operis futuri materiam" (ASD II-3:22). In other words, he brought with him a *silva*. He also left with one, for, as we have seen, he regards the published version of the work, the *Adagiorum Chiliades*, as a "rudis sylva" (ASD II-5:28). It seems that at every stage of composition, the humanist miscellany retains an affinity for chaos.

This tendency characterizes not only neo-Latin prose works but also vernacular poetry collections. Chaos is both a prominent theme and a recurrent rhyme word in Joachim Du Bellay's masterpiece *Les Regrets et autres oeuvres poétiques* (1558), whose title seems to announce the composite and miscellaneous character of the work. In a sonnet addressed to fellow poet Jacques Peletier du Mans, the poet of the *Regrets* offers a portrait of Rome as the microcosm of all the good and evil in the world.

13 See Angelo Poliziano, *Commento inedito ai Fasti di Ovidio*, ed. Francesco Lo Monaco (Florence, 1991) xxv–xxvi.

Bref je diray qu'icy, comme en ce vieil Caos,  
 Se trouve (Peletier) confusément enclos  
 Tout ce qu'on void de bien, et de mal en ce monde. R78 vv. 12–14<sup>14</sup>

The deictic adverb “icy” of verse 12 can be taken to refer not only to the city of Rome, where Du Bellay resided from 1553 to 1557 in the service of Cardinal Jean Du Bellay, but also to the collection in which this poem appears. As heterogeneous as Rome itself, the *Regrets* are a chaos or a confusion of good and evil. The pairing “de bien et de mal” of the final verse echoes the very first sonnet of the collection, where the poet disavows any more grandiose intention than to respond to the various occasions of Roman life as they arise in the course of his stay.

Mais suivant de ce lieu les accidents divers  
 Soit de bien, soit de mal, j'escris à l'adventure. R1 vv. 7–8

We find the same formula in sonnet 21, where the poet claims to write whatever comes into his mouth:

J'escry naïvement tout ce qu'au coeur me touche  
 Soit de bien, soit de mal, comme il vient à la bouche. R21 vv. 6–7

In their moral eclecticism, their indiscriminate association of good and evil, the *Regrets* resemble Rome. At the same time, by alluding to the adage *Quicquid in buccam venerit* or “tout ce qui vient à la bouche,” the poet allies himself with Folly, who cites the same proverb to describe her impromptu manner of speaking.<sup>15</sup> This is yet another link between the *Regrets* and the humanist *farrago*.<sup>16</sup>

There is one sonnet in particular in the *Regrets* that develops Ovid's image of primordial chaos from the beginning of the *Metamorphoses*. Sonnet 125 welcomes the signing of the truce between Spain and France in 1556, which is one of the “accidents divers” that supply the subject matter of the collection

14 Joachim Du Bellay, *Les Regrets et autres oeuvres poétiques*, ed. J. Jolliffe and M.A. Screech (Geneva, 1979).

15 In the *Praise of Folly* (ASD IV-3:74), Folly cites the Greek form of a proverb which Erasmus includes in his collection as adage 473, *Quicquid in linguam venerit*, which follows the nearly identical adage *Quicquid in buccam venerit*.

16 It may also be a link to what Kathy Eden calls the Renaissance rediscovery of intimacy. See Eden (2012) 78 note 7.

according to the first sonnet. The poem celebrates the truce as a resolution of chaos. The quatrains evoke the chaos of war in terms of Ovid's "discordia semina rerum" while repeating the rhyme *Caos / enclos* from poem 78.

Dedans le ventre obscur, où jadis fut encloz  
 Tout cela qui depuis a remply ce grand vide,  
 L'air, la terre, et le feu, et l'element liquide,  
 Et tout cela qu'Atlas soustient dessus son doz,  
 Les semences du Tout estoient encor' en gros,  
 Le chault avec le sec, le froid avec l'humide,  
 Et l'accord, qui depuis leur imposa la bride,  
 N'avoit encor' ouvert la porte du Caos. R125 vv. 1–8

The final verses compare the end of hostilities to the separation of the elements from the mass of chaos:

Sans la trefve (Seigneur) de la paix messagere,  
 Qui trouva le secret, et d'une main legere  
 La paix avec l'amour en fit sortir dehors. R125 vv. 12–14

This elaborate image of chaos signals not only the poet's impatience with war, which is a pervasive theme of the collection, but also the self-recognition of the *Regrets* as a type of *silva* or chaos in the humanist construction of the term. Like a proper humanist miscellany, the *Regrets* contain "les semences du tout": they enclose a wide range of emotions, reflections, and occasions that defy generic classification.<sup>17</sup>

Du Bellay's fascination with the myth of chaos led him back to a pre-Ovidian account of order emerging from chaos when he was commissioned to translate a number of passages from classical Latin verse into French for Louis Le Roy's vernacular commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, which appeared the same year as the *Regrets* in 1558. One of these passages is from Virgil's sixth eclogue, where Silenus sings of the origin of the cosmos and how the elements

17 For further examples of the motif of chaos in Du Bellay's poetry drawn from the whole range of his work, see Simone Perrier, "Versions et variations dans l'oeuvre de Joachim Du Bellay" in *D'une fantastique bigarrure: Le texte composite à la Renaissance* (Paris, 2000) 229–241; especially 236–237. Jean-Claude Ternaux has studied Du Bellay's imitation of the Latin poet Lucan's use of the motif of chaos in *Lucain et la littérature de l'âge baroque en France. Citation, imitation et création* (Paris, 2000) 178–182.

disengage themselves from their original confusion to form heaven and earth (*Eclogae* 6.31–40). Du Bellay translates this passage as follows:

Car il chantoit comment par le vague du monde  
 Les semences du feu, de la terre et de l'onde  
 S'assemblerent en un, et comment toutes choses  
 De ce commencement furent premier ecloses:  
 Comme la terre fut de la mer séparée,  
 Se formant peu à peu toute chose créée.<sup>18</sup>

What interests the singer and the translator here is the “éclosion,” the burgeoning of form from inchoate matter, which is also a key to the humanist *silva*. The authors of such *silvae* want to capture the process of *éclosion* before it is finished, so as to display this scene of creation and not the finished product. One of the verses from Silenus’ song that Du Bellay did not translate describes the emergence of the woods from the undifferentiated mass of earth: “incipiant silvae cum primum surgere” (*Eclogae* 6.39). Here the detail of the *silvae* forms a recognizable feature of the landscape and is thus a post-chaotic motif, but elsewhere the same word suggests confusion and disorder. This tension is constitutive of the humanist *silva*.

While many Renaissance authors described their works as *silvae*, many others inscribed them with that title, either in Latin or in the vernacular. In 1492 the humanist printer Josse Bade, who went by the Latin name Badius Ascensius, published a verse anthology under the title *Silvae morales*, whose dedicatory epistle, addressed to Pierre and Jacques de Semur, articulates the esthetic program of the humanist miscellany.<sup>19</sup> The author is quite confident that the title he has chosen for his work is appropriate, because his *silvae* contain a variety of natural growth and the raw matter of all moral precepts: “silvas moralis non iniusto vocabulo appellandas credidimus. Variam enim plantationem atque omnium moralium praeceptionum ὕλην id est mateream habent” (a iii r<sup>o</sup>). Clearly, Bade is familiar with Poliziano’s etymology of *silva* from *hyle*. He also quotes the passage from book six of the *Aeneid* where Aeneas sets off through the *silva immensa* to seek the golden bough, according to Sibylline instructions. Similarly, Bade’s anthology requires a “diligentissimus scrutator” to find the golden bough of moral edification, at the same time as it invites a

18 Joachim Du Bellay, *Oeuvres poétiques*, ed. Henri Chamard, vol. 6 (Paris, 1991) 400.

19 *Silvae morales cum interpretatione Ascensii in XII libellos divisae* (Lyon, 1492) a ii r<sup>o</sup> to a iii r<sup>o</sup>. The dedicatory epistle can be read in French translation in Maurice Lebel, *Préfaces de Josse Bade, 1462–1535: humaniste, éditeur-imprimeur et préfacier* (Louvain, 1988).

leisurely stroll from its patrons: “Valete dulcia praesidia nostrasque Silvas si quando vacabit amico pede ingredimini” (a iii r<sup>o</sup>). In this way, the work on which Bade has bestowed the title *Silvae morales* embodies two key characteristics of the miscellany: it is intricate and accessible. It invites leisure and rewards study.

Modern criticism has done much to define the contours of the Renaissance *silva*. Wolfgang Adam has catalogued some of the more curious examples from sixteenth-century Latin prose including a *silva* of jokes, a *silva* of stories, a *silva* of sophisms for students of logic, a *silva* of medicines suited for beginners in the medical art, and a *silva* of Biblical allegories that purports to serve as a complete library for students of theology, thus introducing another metaphor for the storage and retrieval of commonplaces.<sup>20</sup> The bibliographical researches of Sagrario López Poza have revealed the ubiquity of the word *silva* in the titles of Renaissance commonplace books, alternating with *collectanea*, *adversaria*, and the inevitable *flores*.<sup>21</sup> Lina Rodríguez Cacho has studied the evolution of the genre in the Spanish vernacular tradition,<sup>22</sup> which yielded the most famous example of all Renaissance *silvae*, the *Silva de varia lección* of Pedro Mexía first published in Seville in 1540 and republished, expanded, translated, and otherwise plagiarized throughout the course of the sixteenth century and beyond. In his preface to the reader, Mexía explains that he chose his title “porque en las selvas y bosques están las plantas y árboles sin orden ni regla,” and though he may be the founder of the genre in Spanish, he recognizes many predecessors, ancient and modern, including Athenaeus, Caesellius Vindex, Aulus Gellius, Macrobius, Pietro Crinito, Caelius Rhodiginus, Niccolò Leonico Tomeo, *et alia*.<sup>23</sup> This is a handy catalogue of Renaissance compilers and their classical models, whose love of variety induces a sensation of chaos.

In the vernacular tradition, there are some writers willing to explore the connotations of the *silva* beyond the normative appeal to the esthetic of variety. The macaronic poet Teofilo Folengo, author of the eternally popular *Baldus*, wrote a trinitarian *silva* entitled *Caos del Triperuno* which he divided

20 Wolfgang Adam, *Poetische und kritische Wälder. Untersuchungen zu Geschichte und Formen des Schreibens “bei Gelegenheit”* (Heidelberg, 1988) 233–234. The self-professed library of theology is by Jeronimo Lloret, *Sylva allegoriarum totius sacrae scripturae . . . quae loco integrae bibliothecae cuilibet sacrarum literarum studioso servire poterit* (Barcelona, 1570).

21 Sagrario López Poza, “Florilegios, polyantheas, repertorios de sentencias y lugares comunes. Aproximación bibliográfica” *Crítica* 49 (1990) 61–75.

22 Lina Rodríguez Cacho, “La selección de lo curioso en ‘silvas’ y ‘jardines’: notas para la trayectoria del género” *Crítica* 58 (1993) 155–168.

23 Pedro Mexía, *Silva de varia lección*, ed. Antonio Castro, vol. 1 (Madrid, 1989) 161–162.

into three *selve* and which forms a chaotic amalgam of verse and prose, sacred and profane, Latin and vernacular that can only be summed up by the author himself. The preface to the second part explains the sylvan nature of the work.

Now we have arrived at the most confused center of this our Chaos, which is located in the present middle forest [*selva*] full of various kinds of trees and shrubs and thorn bushes mixed together, that is to say of prose, of Latin and macaronic verses with and without rhyme, of dialogues and other confused diversity, but not so confused and mixed up that, having to resolve this chaos with our mind, all the elements cannot suddenly return to their proper seat.<sup>24</sup>

Here Folengo exploits the two senses of *silva* as a forest of trees and plants randomly disposed and as a chaos which the mind will resolve into order. This resolution, which criticism has rarely accomplished in the case of Folengo's book, involves the separation of the elements from their initial confusion, as we saw in Virgil, Ovid and Du Bellay. The separation or individuation of the elements from primal chaos represents, in the context of sixteenth-century humanism, the ambition of classification, of organization and control of disparate material. Folengo is confident that the elements will return to their rightful *seggio* or *sedes*, which is one of the terms used for commonplace headings, along with *titulus* or *locus*. By evoking if never achieving this passage from disorder to order, Folengo situates his work between the two poles of the commonplace tradition: the affinity for chaos and the ideal of cosmos.

We can witness this same tension between order and chaos in a work that marks a chronological boundary of the humanist tradition, Francis Bacon's last work, the *Sylva sylvarum* of 1626. Through its title, the work advertises itself as the universal *silva* or place of all commonplaces, but Bacon was very uneasy with the tradition of the humanist *silva*. In the preface to this posthumously published work, which consists of one thousand experiments grouped in ten centuries, Bacon's assistant William Rawley confides that the author was reluctant to publish his work, "for it may seem an indigested heap of particulars,

24 Teofilo Folengo, *Opere italiane*, ed. Umberto Renda, vol. 1 (Bari, 1911) 221: "Or pervegnuti siamo al centro confusissimo di questo nostro *Caos*, lo quale ritrovasi ne la presente seconda 'selva' di varie maniere d'arbori, virgulti, spine e pruni mescolatamente ripiena, cioè di prose, versi senza rime e con rime, latini, macaroneschi, dialoghi, e d'altra diversitate confusa, ma non anco si confusa e rammeschiata che, dovendosi questo *Caos* con lo 'ntelletto nostro disciogliere, tutti gli elementi non subitamente sapessero al proprio lor seggio ritornarsi."

and cannot have that lustre which books cast into methods have.”<sup>25</sup> The phrase “indigested heap of particulars” is a very serviceable translation of Ovid’s “rudis indigestaque moles,” but Rawley hardly seems enthusiastic about the chaotic connotations of this new *silva*. In fact he seems frankly apologetic about the disorder of the collection and suggests that the work contains “a secret order” which is related to causal reasoning. By explaining the causes of the natural phenomena which he observed or about which he read, Bacon hoped to provide a thread to guide us through the dark wood of raw material which he compiled:

He did consider likewise, that by this addition of causes, men’s minds (which make so much haste to find out the causes of things) would not think themselves utterly lost in a vast wood of experience, but stay upon these causes (such as they are) a little, till true axioms may be more fully discovered.<sup>26</sup>

It seems that the *silva* now aspires to lead us out of the woods rather than into them, suggesting that, by the end of Bacon’s lifetime, disorder is going out of fashion among the learned.

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25 Francis Bacon, *Works*, ed. Spedding and Ellis, vol. 4 (Boston, 1864) 155.

26 Bacon *Works* 4:157.

## A Gem in its Setting

### Humanist Epistolography

In the dedicatory epistle which he wrote for the very first edition of his adages, the *Adagiorum Collectanea* of 1500, addressing his pupil and patron William Blount Lord Mountjoy, Erasmus anticipates a series of possible, and often antithetical objections to his new work including the complaint: “Frigere quae-piam videbuntur” (ASD II-9:46) or some will seem dull and lifeless. His answer takes the form of a proverb, unattested in prior collections and unused in subsequent ones: “non fulget gemma in sterquilinio, quod in anulo” or a gem does not shine in a dungheap as it does in a ring. Just as a gem must be set in a ring to realize its full splendor, so the literary commonplace needs a proper discursive setting in order to display its true value. Adages which seem dull or insipid on their own are graceful when used at the proper time and place: “quae per se frigida videntur, in loco adhibita gratiam habent.” To disparage adages *per se* may not be the most clever publicity strategy in the introduction to a collection where the adages are, by and large, left to stand on their own, but the distinction between *adagia per se* and *in loco adhibita* reminds us what an advantageous setting for adages Erasmus has found in his own letter, which is from beginning to end a tissue of gnomic sayings. Adages proliferate here to such an extent that the letter to Lord Mountjoy can serve as a sort of epitome of the *Collectanea*, just in case the patron is disinclined to read beyond the preface.

Erasmus returns to the theme of the proper setting for adages eight years later in the *Prologomena* to the *Adagiorum Chiliades* (Venice, 1508) under the rubric “How far to use adages” or “quatenis utendum adagiis” (ASD II-1:66). Invoking the authority of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and transferring the principle from epithets to adages, he insists that we cannot just insert adages wherever we please. If it is ridiculous to put a gem in the wrong setting, so it is absurd to use an adage out of place: “Praeterea ne quovis inseramus loco: quemadmodum enim ridiculum sit, si quibusdam locis gemmam alligaris, itidem absurdum, si non suo loco adhibueris adagium.” After some cautionary advice taken from Quintilian, the author concludes that, of all genres, the familiar epistle allows the greatest latitude to proverbial speech: “In epistolis tamen familiaribus licebit paulo liberius hoc genere ludere.” Erasmus’ understanding of the letter is largely tributary to the epistolographic ideals of the immediately preceding



generation of Renaissance humanists, as Felix Heinimann has shown quite concisely and convincingly.<sup>1</sup> Angelo Poliziano and Ermolao Barbaro are chiefly responsible for introducing the “neue Stilideal” (Heinimann 178) that Erasmus was to assimilate in his own writing and that makes the familiar letter the prime vehicle for the circulation of proverbs and other commonplace figures of speech in Renaissance humanism.

In this regard, as in nearly all others, the humanists followed the lead of the ancients, who recognized the affinity between epistolary literature and proverbial speech.<sup>2</sup> The *locus classicus* for such recognition is the treatise on style traditionally ascribed to Demetrius of Phaleron, who maintains that epistolary style derives its beauty from the frequent proverbs which also constitute the sole wisdom or philosophy of the letter.<sup>3</sup> Demetrius’ treatise was first printed in 1508 by Aldo Manuzio in the *Rhetores Graeci* under the title *De interpretatione*, but it was known earlier in manuscript, both to Barbaro and to Poliziano, and now goes by the title *De elocutione*. In his lectures on Statius, when commenting on the dedicatory epistle of book one of the *Silvae*, Poliziano paraphrases the crucial passage from Demetrius as a lesson in *festivitas*.<sup>4</sup> When Erasmus first mentions Demetrius’ treatise, in *Collectanea* 698, he cites the text via Barbaro’s *Castigationes Pliniana*, but in subsequent editions of the *Adages* he may have consulted the text directly in the Aldine edition.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the Renaissance, Justus Lipsius translated the section of the *De elocutione* devoted to letters in an appendix to his own *Epistolica institutio*.<sup>6</sup> The reception of the *De elocutione* is an important factor in the circulation of commonplaces, for the humanists were eager to put into practice what Demetrius prescribed in theory.

1 Felix Heinimann, “Zu den Anfängen der humanistischen Paroemiologie” in *Catalepton. Festschrift für Bernhard Wyss zum 80. Geburtstag* (Basel, 1985) 158–82.

2 See A. López Eire, “El mito, los refranes y la epistolografía: el ejemplo de las *Cartas de Libanio*” in *Mitos en la literatura griega helenística e imperial* (Madrid, 2003) 261–298 and Fernando García Romero, “La paremiología griega antigua” *Proverbium* 27 (2010) 75–112, especially 88–89.

3 Demetrius, *De elocutione* 232.

4 Angelo Poliziano, *Commento inedito alle Selve di Stazio*, ed. Cesarini Martinelli (Florence, 1978) 16 cited in Helene Harth, “Poggio Bracciolini und die Brieftheorie des 15. Jahrhunderts. Zur Gattungsform des humanistischen Briefs” in *Der Brief im Zeitalter der Renaissance* (Weinheim, 1983) 81–99; 89.

5 According to the conjectures of M.L. van Poll-van de Lisdonk (ASD II-1:133).

6 *Iusti Lipsi Epistolica Institutio, Excepta e dictantis eius ore, Anno 1587 mense Iunio. Adiunctum est Demetrii Phalerei eiusdem argumenti scriptum. Editio ultima* (Antwerp, 1614). Pages 19 to 23 of this edition are occupied by a bilingual Greek-Latin edition of the *De elocutione* 223–235.

One of the guiding principles of classical epistolography is reciprocity or equal exchange, and this principle itself receives proverbial expression in Cicero's letters to Atticus. In the first letter of book six, one of the longest letters of the extant correspondence, Cicero sums up by assuring his friend that he has answered his previous letter not with gold for bronze but tit for tat or *paria paribus* (*Epistolae ad Atticum* 6.1.22). The Greek phrase meaning gold for bronze is χρύσεα χαλκείων and derives from an episode in book six of Homer's *Iliad* where Diomedes and Glaucus exchange armor. Atticus must have used the saying as a form of self-deprecation, which Cicero courteously corrects, insisting on the parity between himself and his correspondent.<sup>7</sup> Marc Antoine Muret makes the same self-deprecatory use of the saying in a vernacular letter to Claude Dupuy when he apologizes for making an unequal exchange: "Puis qu'il vous plait que je vous face part d'aucunes miennes corrections, je le ferai. mais je sais bien qu'en ce change vous serés Glaucus et je serai Diomedes."<sup>8</sup> As we shall see in the course of this study, the proverb χρύσεα χαλκείων circulates liberally among Renaissance humanists and even librarians. While Homeric heroes may exchange gold for bronze (through primitive generosity or precocious fraud), correspondents must give as good as they get. One thing which they are expected to exchange in equal measure is proverbs.

Erasmus' own correspondence thoroughly exploits this tendency of the epistolary genre to indulge in proverbs. His paroemiographic impulse was stimulated by an early exchange of notes with Fausto Andrelini in 1499, three years after the latter had authored a collection of *Epistolae Adagiales*.<sup>9</sup> Warning his interlocutor not to make fun of the theologians, Erasmus writes, "Verum non expedit irritare crabrones" (Allen 1:236). The saying *irritare crabrones* appears the very next year in the *Collectanea* and reappears in the *Chiliades*. Fausto answers dismissively that they should attach no more importance to the irritable theologians than an elephant does to a flea. Erasmus kept this in mind until he composed the adage *culicem elephantī conferre* for the *Chiliades*. Recognizing Erasmus' potential, Fausto reprinted their brief correspondence in the new edition of his proverbial letters, published later that year of 1499.

7 In his commentary on the Digest of Roman civil law, Guillaume Budé takes this phrase to be the expression of parity between correspondents: "Propterea Cicero respondet ad omnia se ita respondisse, ut paria cum Attico fecisse se putaret, non meliora scripsisse." *Annotationes in Pandectas* (Paris, 1542) 280.

8 The letter, dated July 30, 1571, is transcribed in Jean-Eudes Girot, *Marc-Antoine Muret. Des Isles Fortunées au rivage romain* (Geneva, 2012) 367.

9 For Fausto Andrelini's influence on Erasmus, see Maria Cytowska, "Erasmus et Beroaldo" *Eos* 65 (1977) 265–71.

Angelo Poliziano took the editorial initiative to consecrate this new epistolary fashion when he compiled the twelve books of his correspondence, which he dedicated to Piero de' Medici in 1494, but which were not published until the posthumous edition of his *Opera* in 1498. It was through this edition that Erasmus became familiar not only with Poliziano's own letters but also with the letters of other humanists such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Ermolao Barbaro that Poliziano included in his *Libri Epistolarum*. One of Poliziano's most important editorial decisions was to include among his own correspondence the exchange of letters between Barbaro and Pico on the *genus dicendi philosophorum* and the underlying conflict between humanism and scholasticism.<sup>10</sup> The most famous letter from this sequence is Giovanni Pico's letter to Ermolao Barbaro of June 3, 1485 defending barbarity and attacking eloquence. All the letters in this sequence, including Poliziano's own to Bernardo Ricci introducing his friends' epistolary exchange, are crammed with proverbial sayings, none more so than Barbaro's lengthy rejoinder to Pico's masterpiece, a letter which, as Heinimann reminds us, begins and ends with a veritable torrent of proverbs.<sup>11</sup> We know that this letter of Barbaro to Pico, letter five of book nine in the *Libri Epistolarum*, made a strong impression on Erasmus, because he tells us so ingenuously enough in adage 306 from the *Collectanea*, entitled *Ranis propinas* or "you serve wine to frogs." What particularly impresses the author of the *Collectanea* is the copious use of proverbs in a densely proverbial sequence from the beginning of the speech which a hypothetical scholastic spokesman makes in repudiation of Pico's eloquent patronage. The text of adage 306 can be rendered as follows:

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- 10 The Pico-Barbaro controversy has sponsored an enormous bibliography including Quirinus Breen, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on the Conflict of Philosophy and Rhetoric," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (1952) 384–412; Eugenio Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano* (Bari, 1952) 119–123; Hanna Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24 (1963) 497–514; Mario Martelli, "Il 'Libro delle epistole' di Angelo Poliziano," *Interpres* 1 (1978) 184–255; Francesco Bausi, *Nec rhetor neque philosophus* (Florence, 1996) 13–67; Letizia Panizza, "Pico della Mirandola's 1485 Parody of Scholastic 'Barbarians'" in *Italy in Crisis 1494*, ed. J. Everson and D. Zancani (Oxford, 2000) 152–174; Ann Moss, *Renaissance Truth and the Latin Language Turn* (Oxford, 2003) 66–70; Louis Valcke, *Pic de la Mirandole un itinéraire philosophique* (Paris, 2005) 107–132; Jill Kraye, "Pico on the Relationship of Rhetoric and Philosophy" in *Pico della Mirandola. New Essays*, ed. Dougherty (Cambridge, 2008) 13–36; and Eric MacPhail, *The Sophistic Renaissance* (Geneva, 2011) 65–71.
- 11 Heinimann 180: "In seinem längsten Brief (Ep. 81), häuft Ermolao schon im Anfangsteil griechische Sprichwörter, und zum Abschluss kleidet er seine Warnung vor Picos vergeblichem Unternehmen und seine Mahnungen in einen ganzen Strauss von Adagia."

*You serve wine to frogs* that is, you offer them what they do not need. Ermolao used this proverb in a certain letter to Pico in the following way: “That Pico has put big shoes on small feet. What’s the use of so much rhetoric? And why does he serve wine to frogs? Mute frogs, I might add.” In this one sequence, he combines three adages, first about shoes bigger than the feet, next about serving wine to frogs, and third about mute frogs.<sup>12</sup>

The three proverbs cited here all appear in the *Collectanea* and again in the *Chiliades*.<sup>13</sup> One of them already occurs in the letter to Lord Mountjoy where we learn that Saint Jerome made such a prolific use of adages that, in comparison, all subsequent theologians seem to be so many *ranas Seryphias* or mute frogs (ASD 11-9:40). Here Erasmus has discovered a proverb for the failure to use proverbs.

In editing his collection of letters, Poliziano was eager to advertise his reputation as a humanist as well as to pursue scholarly polemics begun much earlier. In book two Poliziano reproduces a letter that Girolamo Donato sent to Giovanni Pico in 1484, in which Donato hails the recent publication of Poliziano’s neo-Latin poem entitled *Rusticus* and proclaims the poet “splendor aetatis nostrae.”<sup>14</sup> In response to this letter, which Pico must have shared with him, Poliziano sent Donato a long and sententious meditation on praise and self-awareness that can serve both as an essay on moral philosophy and a miniature collection of adages. Mindful of Aesop’s fable of the two pouches or *πήραι*, Poliziano will not allow Donato’s generous judgment of his work to blind him to his own demerits, like the man in the fable who sees only the pouch in front of him, full of others’ faults, and never the one in back full of his own.<sup>15</sup> This fable yields the adage *non videmus manticae quod in tergo est*, that was to play such an important role in Rabelais’ *Tiers Livre* and which Montaigne was to remember in his essay on the art of conversation: “Noz yeux

12 “Βατράχοις οἶνοχοεῖς id est *Ranis propinas*, id est ministras iis, qui ipsi abundant. Quo proverbio Hermolaus in quadam ad Picum epistola hunc in modum est usus: *Picus iste parvo pedi magnos calceos circumdedit. Quid enim tot rhetoricis? Aut quid omnino ranis propinat? imo Seriphiis addidi.* Qua una in oratione tria attigit adagia, primum de calceis pede maioribus, alterum de propinante ranis, tertium de Seriphiis ranis” ASD 11-9:142.

13 *Parvo pedi magnos calcios circumdare* (*Collectanea* 781, *Chiliades* 2567); *Ranis propinas* (*Collectanea* 306, *Chiliades* 1220); *Rana Seriphia* (*Collectanea* 303, *Chiliades* 431).

14 Poliziano, *Letters*, ed. Shane Butler, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA, 2006) 114.

15 “Neque enim ita mihi sum inexploratus ut tibi . . . plus de me credendum statuam quam ipse mihi, nisi forte ita me ludit illa poetarum . . . insania ut . . . nunquam de tergo in peccatus mantica revocem.” *Letters* 114–16.

ne voient rien en derriere" (III,8,929). Moreover, if poetic glory comes at the cost of self-knowledge, Poliziano feels that it is but a poor exchange, no better than Glaucus' bargain of gold for bronze or χρύσεα χαλκείων (*Letters* 116). Though recognizing his own unworthiness, Poliziano is afraid that he cannot afford to refuse Donato's praise, or return the latter's own words to him, lest he be left naked like Aesop's crow: "ne . . . nudum ipse me statuam et, ut illa Aesopi cornicula plumis ablatis, moveam risum" (*Letters* 118). The image of the crow derives from Horace's epistles (1.3), where the crow dressed in borrowed feathers stands for the imitative poet adorned with others' verses.<sup>16</sup> While Poliziano's use of the crow may retain this connotation of plagiarism, he also adds the sense of usurped or unmerited praise. This is the sense that Erasmus will seize on, not in his adages, but in the *Praise of Folly*, whence the image will exert a wider influence on vernacular literature as a satiric topos regarding client-patron relations. In conclusion, Poliziano confides that, as long as he enjoys the esteem of such eminent figures as Donato, Pico, and Barbaro, he can afford to dismiss all other critics. Literally, he gives them the finger: "medium ostendo digitum" (*Letters* 118). Erasmus will reserve a place in his collection for the adage *medium ostendere digitum* (adage 1368).

Among the many commonplaces that Poliziano puts into circulation in his letter to Donato, and not by any means the most conspicuous, is the Latin adage *amussis alba* or white line (which is hard to distinguish especially against a white background). In his love of learning, Poliziano professes to be a white line, that is to say, unable to discriminate, so that he loves all learned men equally and indiscriminately (*Letters* 118). This proverb subsequently provoked a controversy with Giorgio Merula, to whom Poliziano responds in a letter of 1494 that he includes in the eleventh book of his correspondence, a book largely devoted to gloating over the death of Merula, which was quickly followed by Poliziano's own death in the same year of 1494. In a brief letter to Bernardo Ricci, his confidante in Milan, Poliziano says that he understands that Merula criticized his use of the proverb *alba linea*, a variant of *amussis alba*. To justify his paroemiographic credentials, Poliziano explains to his correspondent the meaning of the saying, the variant forms in Greek and Latin, the classical precedents, and most importantly, the Socratic allusion of his earlier letter to Donato. When Poliziano declared an indiscriminate love of the

16 "ne . . . moveat cornicula risum furtivis nudata coloribus" *Epistulae* 1.3.18–20. Horace's image has inspired the title of an interesting new collection of essays *Borrowed Feathers. Plagiarism and the Limits of Imitation in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Hall Bjornstad (Oslo, 2008). Curiously, none of the contributors noticed the presence of the Horatian topos either in Erasmus or in his immediate source, Poliziano.

learned, we were meant to recall Plato's dialogue *Charmides*, where Socrates says that he is not a reliable judge of beauty, for he thinks all young men are beautiful. He is, in that respect, the proverbial λευκή στήλη or white line (154B). Merula, Poliziano insinuates, was too dull to catch the allusion. Poliziano's letter to Ricci, which is only a paragraph long, is an important model for the Erasmian adage, covering the genealogy of the saying *alba linea*, its meaning and usage, and its controversy. Erasmus was certainly paying attention, and from the earliest stages of his career, for in the dedication of the *Collectanea*, he admonishes Lord Mountjoy that adages are not to be used indiscriminately or, as the saying goes, *alba amussi* but only by some of the people some of the time.<sup>17</sup>

In this way, Erasmus is true to the spirit of Poliziano's own letter, which discusses proverbs proverbially. First, Poliziano repeats the information that Ricci heard from some sharp-eared Corycean that Merula blames him somewhere for mistaking the adage: "Sed a Coryceo tamen quodam tuis ais esse auribus insusurratum, reprehendi ab illo me quodam loco, quod albae lineae proverbium secus acceperim."<sup>18</sup> Erasmus collects this saying in the form *Coriceus auscultavit* gathered ostensibly from Strabo and Cicero, through the unacknowledged intermediaries of Filippo Beroaldo il vecchio and, I would add, Poliziano (ASD II-9:83). Next, Poliziano declares that he will respond to such scurrilous aspersions casually and not with the full weight of his erudition: "Respondebo leviter et quod aiunt suspensa manu." The locution *suspensa manu* naturally works its way into Erasmus' collection of adages, whence it flows into the broader currents of Renaissance humanism.

Erasmus' collection of adages draws not only on humanist correspondence but also on classical and patristic letter collections. In particular, the last major addition to the Adages, the supplement of 488 sayings incorporated in the 1533 edition draws extensively on Cicero's correspondence, both *Ad familiares* and *Ad Atticum*. One of the letters that helps to replenish the adages is *Ad familiares* 9.15 addressed to Papirius Paetus, where Cicero deplores the influx of foreigners into Rome and their effect on the Latin language. He assures his correspondent of his constant affection and solicitude for the latter's health in as much as Paetus is one of the last living representatives of good old Roman wit. Such has been the civic invasion of transalpine barbarians that not a trace is left of native wit, "ut nullum veteris leporis vestigium appareat" (9.15.2), except of course for the phrase "not a trace left," which Erasmus duly collects in his adage

17 "Neque statim quaecunque huius essent generis, alba (ut dicitur) amussi converrimus, immo vero iuxta Graecum adagium *nec omnia nec passim nec ab omnibus*" ASD II-9:44.

18 Angelo Poliziano, *Omnia opera* (Venice, 1498; reprint Rome, 1968) p. iiiii v°.



3832 *Ne vestigium quidem*. This adage is in fact a veritable cento fashioned out of no fewer than thirteen *loci* from the speeches and letters of Cicero and filled with traces of nostalgia for lost people and things. Cicero's letter exemplifies another function of the epistolary genre as a conservatory of endangered speech, which would otherwise vanish without a trace. Marc Antoine Muret recalls this function of the genre in a university lecture of November 1582 on Cicero's *Epistolae ad Atticum*, where he advises his students that almost all uses of eloquence, except for the use we make in writing letters, have vanished from our midst without a trace, "ut nec vola nec vestigium appareat."<sup>19</sup> Muret cites the standard version of the adage, *nec vola nec vestigium*, of which Erasmus cites a variant, *Ne vestigium quidem*.<sup>20</sup>

Not only is the letter the genre best suited to proverbs; it is also the genre best described in proverbs. Erasmus deploys the full range of his paroemiographic talents in his treatise on letter writing known as *De conscribendis epistolis*. For Erasmus, the letter defies prescriptive definition because it is a protean form that must adapt to all circumstances, and this property itself calls for proverbial treatment. Accordingly, rather than enumerate all the possible styles of the letter, he says that it ought to be like the polyp: "Finally, not to pursue an endless list, it should be flexible, and, as the polyp adapts itself to every condition of its surroundings, so a letter should adapt itself to every kind of subject and circumstance" (CWE 25:19).<sup>21</sup> In natural historical terms, the polyp is a sort of chameleon of the sea, and like other emblematic animals, it is a favorite of the paroemiographic tradition. The adage *polypus* from the *Collectanea* mutates to the plural *polypi* in the *Chiliades*, where it applies to those who are either obtuse or greedy, but, Erasmus adds, nothing prevents us from applying the same epithet to those who can assume any guise or adapt to any company.<sup>22</sup> The epithet, like the animal, is infinitely malleable. Similarly, the adage *polypi mentem obtine* can signify either a shameless opportunism or an agreeable adaptability (ASD II-1:198–202). Only a form as mutable as the proverbial polyp can capture the various properties of the letter while also insinuating that

19 Muret, *Opera omnia*, I:406.

20 Otto 1934 records *nec vola nec vestigium* whereas *ne vestigium quidem* leaves no trace in his collection.

21 "Denique (ne quae sunt infinita persequar) sit versipellis, ac polypus quemadmodum semet ad omnem subiecti soli habitum, ita sese ad quemvis argumenti reliquarumque circumstantiarum habitum attemperet" ASD I-2:223.

22 "*Polypi* proverbio dicebantur olim vel stupidi stolidique, vel rapaces . . . Nihil autem vetabit, quo minus 'polypos' appellemus eos qui semet in omnem habitum vertunt omnibus assentantes" ASD II-3:306.

the letter writer must adapt to each new correspondent. Later compilers, like Caelius Rhodiginus, will identify the polyp directly with the flatterer.<sup>23</sup>

Erasmus returns to the metaphor of the gem in its setting in the adage *Herculei labores* where he deplores the many hardships of collecting adages that make his task as daunting as the labors of Hercules. Apart from the obvious complaints of monotony and uniformity, the paroemiographer must cope with the additional handicap that his subject, the adage, is only suited for practice and not for theory, or “usu non tractatione”: “Hic quae tractantur, omnia sunt eiusmodi, ut usu, non tractatione splendant ac tum demum genuinam suam ostendant gratiam, cum gemmarum instar commode inserta orationi visuntur” (ASD II-5:32). This is the familiar theme of the gem in its setting, which may be understood as a proverbial expression of the challenges of paroemiography. Yet the distinction drawn between *usus* and *tractatio* is misleading, for to treat of proverbs is also to use them. Every theoretical statement which Erasmus makes about proverbs is expressed proverbially so that, in effect, the adage sets itself, or it theorizes itself. Humanists gloss proverbs with other proverbs so that the danger of isolating proverbs *per se* seems remote. “Separata frigent” (ASD II-5:32), Hercules warns us uselessly. It may therefore be necessary to reverse the metaphor of the textual setting. The author does not set an adage in a text so much as the adage generates the text around it by evoking further adages. In this sense it may be idle to privilege the letter as the setting of adages, except in so far as the letter furthers the circulation of adages more efficiently than do other genres.

We can gain further insight into the metaphor of the gem in its setting from a letter not by or to Erasmus, but for him, namely, the very short letter in which Aldo Manuzio introduces to the studios his edition of the *Adagiorum Chiliades* of 1508.<sup>24</sup> Here Aldo rehearses the merits of the work and emphasizes

23 Lodovicus Caelius Rhodiginus, *Antiquae lectiones* (Basel, 1542) book 13, chapter 32 “Adulator, polypus cur.”

24 Here is the complete text of Aldo's letter, transcribed from *Aldo Manuzio editore: dediche, prefazioni, note ai testi*, ed. Giovanni Orlandi, vol. 1 (Milan, 1975) 93–94: “Aldi Manutii epistola nuncupatoria studiosis omnibus. Quia nihil aliud cupio quam prodesse vobis, studiosi, cum venisset in manus meas Erasmi Roterodami, hominis undecunque doctissimi, hoc adagiorum opus eruditum, varium, plenum bonae frugis, et quod possit vel cum ipsa antiquitate certare, intermissis antiquis autoribus, quos paraveram excudendis, illud curavimus imprimendum, rati profuturum vobis et multitudine ipsa adagiorum, quae ex plurimis autoribus tam Latinis quam Graecis studiose collegit summis certe laboribus, summis vigiliis, et multis locis apud utriusque linguae autores obiter vel correctis acute vel expositis erudite. Docet praeterea, quot modis ex hisce adagiis capere utilita-



the multitude of adages that Erasmus has collected and the prodigious number of verses which he has translated from Greek into Latin. In other words, he stresses the vast dimensions of Erasmus' scholarship rather than the diminutive form of the adage. After these few lines of praise, he tells the reader, "if you don't believe me, judge for yourself" for "the book speaks for itself." The way he says this is to quote two Greek adages that also appear in the *Chiliades* as adages 2228 ἰδοὺ Ῥόδος ἰδοὺ καὶ τὸ πῆδημα and 1486 αὐτὸς αὐτὸν ἀυλεῖ. The first is based on one of Aesop's fables and means literally, "Here is Rhodes, now jump" which is to say, "don't tell us what you can do, show us," and thus, "talk is cheap," or "actions speak louder than words." Similarly, the second proverb, αὐτὸς αὐτὸν ἀυλεῖ or "he flutes himself" means that someone's merits or qualities speak for themselves, so they need no praise. In the *Praise of Folly*, Folly stands this adage on its head in order to indulge in some odious self-praise (ASD IV-3:72). By concluding his prefatory praise of Erasmus' adages with these two ways of saying "Let the facts speak for themselves," Aldo seems to be demonstrating the self-sufficiency of proverbs. His letter shows that proverbs can advertise themselves; they can introduce themselves. They can even make the dedicatory epistle superfluous. In effect, proverbs can serve as their own setting; they are the gem that sets itself.

Adages can just as easily set themselves in other genres than the letter and indeed in other languages than Latin. There were in the course of the sixteenth century several vernacular translations and multilingual editions of Erasmus' adages, including at least one for which the Louvain humanist Pieter Nanninck or Petrus Nannius composed a dedicatory epistle whose figurative language pays homage to the enduring legacy of Erasmian scholarship. In 1561 Ioannes Sartorius came out with a Dutch translation of the *Chiliades* accompanied by Nannius' letter, dated 1557. Here Nannius recognizes, in deference to Sartorius' skill and daring, the difficulty of translating proverbs. If there is any literary form that abhors repatriation, it must be adages: for they are gems in their own language, but when translated into other tongues, as if steeped in vinegar, they melt and lose their native splendor. The passage deserves to be cited integrally for its dense figurative imagery:

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tem liceat, puta quemadmodum ad varios usus accommodari possint. Adde quod circiter decem millia versuum ex Homero, Euripide et caeteris Graecis eodem metro in hoc opere fideliter et docte tralata habentur, praeter plurima ex Platone, Demosthene et id genus aliis. An autem verus sim, ἰδοὺ Ῥόδος ἰδοὺ καὶ τὸ πῆδημα. Nam, quod dicitur, αὐτὸς αὐτὸν ἀυλεῖ."

Quod si quid est quod transplantationem abhorreat, et patriam suam mutare nolit, id imprimis adagia censeas: gemmae sunt in sua lingua, in alias translatae quasi aceto maceratae in humorem omni splendore amisso liquescunt.<sup>25</sup>

Just as a gem steeped in vinegar turns to liquid, so the Erasmian adage dissolves in a vernacular solution. Though meant pejoratively, this image of fluidity is a welcome reminder of the mobility and circulation of commonplaces. To translate is to dilute, to dissolve the *absoluta brevitās* of the Latin saying in a flood of loquacity. Such liquidity brings both loss and gain. Proverbs need to escape the rigid setting of the classical languages in order to find new channels of diffusion, but this dissolution tarnishes their splendor. Such is the challenge facing vernacular writers drawing on the source of commonplace wisdom.

Rabelais shows us one way to meet this challenge in an early episode from the *Quart Livre* where Pantagruel and his companions have just begun their quest for the *Dive Bouteille* or oracle of the Holy Bottle when they receive a letter from Gargantua borne by a messenger named Malicorne on the ship *la Chelidoine*. Gargantua explains to his son and heir that he is particularly anxious for their journey to begin auspiciously since, as the saying goes, “Well begun is half done.” To convey this message, Rabelais’ text pairs a classical saying with a vernacular proverb.

Et pource que selon le dict de Hesiode, d’une chascune chose le commencement est la moytié du tout: et selon le proverbe commun, à l’enfourner on fait les pains cornuz, j’ay pour de telle anxieté vider mon entendement, expressement depesché Malicorne. 544

Hesiod’s saying appears in Erasmus’ adages first as *Principium dimidium totius* (139) and again as *Dimidium plus toto* (895). In the *Prolegomena* to the *Chiliades*, Erasmus cites the second version, “half is more than whole,” as an instance of the capacity of proverbs to encapsulate the lessons of philosophy, lessons of moderation, justice, and self-awareness (ASD II-1:60). In his commentary on adage 895, one of the more extensive commentaries in the first *chiliad*, Erasmus stresses the principle of *mediocritas aurea* (ASD II-2:404) or the golden mean, which is after all the ostensible moral of the *Quart Livre* and which Rabelais may want to recall to our attention at this juncture of his novel. Gargantua prefers the more conventional version, “le commencement est la moytié du tout,” to the more paradoxical superiority of the half to the whole.

25 Erasmus, *Adagiorum Chiliades Tres*, translated by Ioannes Sartorius (Antwerp, 1561) 4.

To acclimate this classical commonplace in his vernacular text, Rabelais pairs it with a popular saying, “à l'enfourner on fait les pains cornuz.” One proverb calls for another, as Rabelais may have meant to insinuate through the name of Gargantua's ship *la Chelidoine*, or the swallow. In this proverbial context, the swallow alludes naturally to the Greek saying μία χελιδὼν ἔαρ οὐ ποιεῖ or “one swallow does not make a spring.” Similarly, one proverb does not make a lesson, or at least not as well as when it is paired with another. The implicit proverb “one swallow does not make a spring” may even undermine the optimism of Gargantua's letter, reminding us not to congratulate ourselves prematurely on the success of our undertakings, in effect creating a tension between proverbs. Well begun is far from done. In any event, the duplication of a classical proverb by a vernacular saying in the *Quart Livre* is similar to Sartorius' project in his editions of Erasmus' *Chiliades*. We will see a more elaborate experiment in vernacular paroemiography in the lyric poetry of Joachim Du Bellay, one of the leaders of the poetic movement known as La Pléiade in mid-sixteenth-century France.

### *Une voile à tout vent: Proverbs in Lyric Poetry*

The reader of Joachim Du Bellay's sonnet sequence *Les Regrets et autres oeuvres poétiques* cannot fail to be impressed or perhaps simply annoyed by the frequency with which the poet resorts to metalinguistic formulae such as “comme on dit” or “comme lon dit” or “comme on dit à la court” which can be shortened or lengthened according to the exigencies of the meter. Such phrases, generally regarded as having a rather low quotient of lyricism, encourage the idea that Du Bellay cultivates an impersonal, objective voice in the *Regrets*. The poet here seems more interested in telling us how the saying goes than he is in conveying his own inner emotional state. In effect, Du Bellay performs his own labor of Hercules as he tirelessly collects proverbs taken either directly from the vernacular or translated from the Latin. In that respect, the *Regrets* form a companion volume to Erasmus' *Adages* where these verbal gems can reveal their lyric potential.<sup>26</sup>

The *Regrets* also inscribe themselves in the epistolary tradition through a number of devices and motifs. In a seminal essay on the *Regrets*, Marc Bizer argues that Du Bellay conceived of his poems as verse epistles whose contents

26 See Marie-Dominique Legrand, “Les *Adages* d'Erasmus au sein des *Regrets* de Joachim Du Bellay” in *Du Bellay. Autour des “Antiquités de Rome” et des “Regrets”*, ed. James Dauphiné (Biarritz, 1994) 65–77.

are specifically oriented toward their addressees.<sup>27</sup> He points out that the poet of the *Regrets* identifies himself as the secretary of his patron Cardinal Jean Du Bellay, and the role of secretary naturally entails letter writing. Many of the 191 sonnets in this unusually extensive and diverse collection use a form of address characteristic of the familiar letter while they report the news from Rome:

Panjas veuls tu sçavoir quels sont mes passetemps? R15  
 Si tu ne sçais Morel ce qu je fais icy R18  
 Il fait bon voir Paschal un conclave serré R81  
 Veuls-tu sçavoir Duthier quelle chose c'est Rome? R82

Others use an unmistakably epistolary form of closure: "Adieu donques Dorat je suis encor' Romain" (R130). As we have seen, in sonnet 21, the poet claims to say whatever comes into his head, according to the adage *Quicquid in buccam venerit*, which was first put into circulation by Cicero in his *Letters to Atticus* (12.1; 14.7) and can therefore be regarded as an epistolary topos. The letter writer speaks without premeditation, and the *Regrets* claim the spontaneity of familiar letters.

Du Bellay's favorite correspondent in this sonnet sequence is his fellow poet Pierre de Ronsard, and there is one sonnet in particular, sonnet 152, that seems to designate their poetic dialogue as an exchange of letters. Bizer draws our attention to the use of the verb "s'entre'crire" in the second quatrain, which he translates as "correspond" and which we could relate to the adage that closes the stanza

Laissons donc je te pry laissons causer ces sotz,  
 Et ces petitz gallandz, qui ne sachant que dire,  
 Disent, voyant Ronsard, et Bellay s'entr'crire,  
 Que ce sont deux muletz, qui se grattent le doz. R152 vv. 5–8

Here the poet admonishes his colleague to ignore those jealous tongues that say Du Bellay and Ronsard praise each other like two donkeys who scratch each other's back. The proverb "to scratch each other's back," or in Latin *mutuum muli scabunt*, which Erasmus collects as adage 696, nicely captures the reciprocity of the epistolary genre, which is essential to the humanist ethos.

27 Marc Bizer, "Letters from Home: The Epistolary Aspects of Joachim Du Bellay's *Les Regrets*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 52 (1999) 140–179.

When set in a sonnet, proverbs have a more formally precise and often a more conspicuous function than when set in prose syntax. Henri Weber has analyzed the function of proverbial speech within the characteristic structure of the sonnet of the *Regrets*, which he defines as a fusion of antithesis and repetition.<sup>28</sup> Often the proverb comes at the end of the poem, furnishing an epigrammatic résumé of the poet's disillusioned experience.<sup>29</sup> In this way, the gnomic tradition gets the last word and resolves the debate staged within the sonnet. An example of this structure can be seen in sonnet 46, which develops the alternative of optimism in the quatrains and cynicism in the tercets. If virtue is rewarded, the poet will prosper; but if vice triumphs, his loyalty will prove futile. The poet does not explicitly resolve this dilemma, but he introduces an asymmetry in the structure by expressing the second option, cynicism, proverbially:

Je cognois que je seme au rivage infertile,  
Que je veux cribler l'eau, et que je bas le vent,  
Et que je suis (Vineus) serviteur inutile. R46 vv. 12–14<sup>30</sup>

We can easily recognize here a series of adages from the first half-chiliad of Erasmus' collection, a series devoted to futile or fruitless tasks such as *arare littus* (351), *cribro aquam haurire* (360), or *reti ventos venaris* (363). In the rhetorical tradition, the name for such tasks is τὰ ἀδύνατα or impossible things. In his final tercet, the poet of R46 is a successor to Quarêmeprenant from Rabelais' *Quart Livre*, a personification of Lent, who performs similar *adunata* such as fishing in the air or hunting in the sea.<sup>31</sup> The poet may yet earn the wages of loyalty, but frustration, expressed in commonplaces, certainly has more precedent. Thus, the use of proverbs makes the second outcome seem more likely than the first, which is stated literally: "j'auray (comme je pense) / Quelque bien à la fin, car je l'ay merité" (vv. 7–8). When expressed proverbially, futility seems more plausible and more immediate than prosperity.

28 Henri Weber, *La création poétique au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle en France de Maurice Scève à Agrippa d'Aubigné* (Paris, 1955) 430–34.

29 For Du Bellay's use of the epigram, see George Hugo Tucker's commentary on *Les Regrets et autres oeuvres poétiques de Joachim Du Bellay* (Paris, 2000) 49–51.

30 Joachim Du Bellay, *Les Regrets et autres oeuvres poétiques*, ed. J. Jolliffe and M.A. Screech (Geneva, 1979).

31 "Se baignoit dessus les haulx clochers, se seichoit dedans les estangs et rivières. Peschoit en l'air, et y prenoit Escrevisses decumanes. Chassoit en profond de la mer, et y trouvoit Ibices, Stamboucqs, et Chamoy's" (Rabelais 614).

Elsewhere, rather than resolve the poet's dilemma, proverbs can serve to maintain a structure of suspense. Sonnet 33 implores the poet's friend and patron Jean Morel to help him decide whether to stay in Rome or return to France. After vacillating for thirteen verses, the poem concludes with a proverbial image of irresolution: "Car je tiens, comme on dit, le loup par les oreilles" (R33, v. 14). According to Erasmus, others who say *auribus lupum teneo* include the character Antiphon in Terence's comedy *Phormio*, Emperor Tiberius in Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*, and more generally those who are faced with an insoluble dilemma (ASD 11-1:498). To hold the proverbial wolf by the ears does not allow for either advance or retreat, and the sonnet seems to freeze in this posture of indecision. In fact, the act of quotation takes the place of any political commitment in sonnet 33, so that we may say that the poet's loyalty goes neither to France nor to Rome but to the commonplace tradition, which is supranational.

If we consult a different gloss on the same adage, from the humanist jurist Alexander ab Alexandro, we can appreciate a different aspect of Du Bellay's collection. For Alexander, to hold the wolf by the ears means to be led on by vain hope: "cum irrita caderent promissa et vana spe ducerentur, se auribus lupum tenere dicebant."<sup>32</sup> In effect, the poet of the *Regrets* often regrets the false hope of social or political promotion that lured him to Rome in the service of Cardinal Jean Du Bellay. The poet's "espoir flateur" (R16) alternates with "un espoir malheureux" (R19), "une longue esperance" (R33), and "un traistre espoir" (R45). The disillusioned tone of these elegiac sonnets suits the ambitious secretary who holds the wolf by the ears as well as the errant poet surrounded by wolves in sonnet 9: "Entre les loups cruels j'erre parmy la plaine." In either reading, the adage *auribus lupum teneo*, from a rich constellation of proverbial sayings involving wolves, of which we will encounter a further example in the conclusion to this study, helps to illuminate the structure and the themes of the *Regrets*.

At times Du Bellay uses proverbs to interrogate the logic of proverbial wisdom. If proverbs purport to encapsulate human experience and to regulate human behavior according to universal principles, Rome, as portrayed in the *Regrets*, defies the ambitions of paroemiography. Sonnet 101 portrays the chaotic social striving at the Roman curia, where success and failure answer to no rules. The irresolute structure of the sonnet serves its anti-gnomic lesson. The first stanza could be entitled "Par divers moyens on arrive à pareille fin":

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32 Alexander ab Alexandro *Genialium dierum libri sex varia ac recondita eruditione referti* (Paris, 1532) 140 v<sup>o</sup>.

Que dirons nous (Melin) de ceste court Romaine,  
 Où nous voions chacun divers chemins tenir,  
 Et aux plus haults honneurs les moindres parvenir,  
 Par vice, par vertu, par travail, et sans peine? R101 vv. 1–4

The next two stanzas anticipate the theme of “Divers evenements du même conseil”:

L’un fait pour s’avancer une despence vaine,  
 L’autre par ce moyen se voit grand devenir,  
 L’un par severité se sçait entretenir,  
 L’autre gaigne les coeurs par sa douceur humaine:  
 L’un pour ne s’avancer se voit estre avancé,  
 L’autre pour s’avancer se voit desavancé,  
 Et ce qui nuit à l’un, à l’autre est profitable: R101 vv. 5–11

The final tercet poses an antithesis between two sayings without preferring one to the other. We can note in passing that the second saying, “l’ignorance attire le bon heur,” is in fact the paradoxical thesis advanced by Moria in Erasmus’ *Encomium Moriae*, a text to which Du Bellay’s *Regrets* owe an unacknowledged debt:

Qui dit que le sçavoir est le chemin d’honneur,  
 Qui dit que l’ignorance attire le bon heur,  
 Lequel des deux (Melin) est le plus veritable? R101 vv. 12–14

To set in tension the praise of ignorance and the praise of knowledge, as Erasmus himself does, is to cast doubt on normative values and to neutralize the authority of proverbs. No gnomic saying can do justice to Rome: there is no rulebook for the papal court.

The *Regrets* have already broached this theme in sonnet 26, addressed to Pierre de Ronsard. Here, rather than envy his more fortunate colleague, as he purports to do in sonnets 16, 17, 19, and 20, the poet condescends to advise him how to navigate the treacherous waters of the Roman curia, which he calls “ceste mer Romaine” (R26 v. 9). From the vantage point of the experienced traveler, the newcomer to Rome will incur ever greater dangers unless he demonstrates miraculous adaptability:

Trompé du chant pippeur des monstres de Sicile  
 Pour Carybde eviter tu tomberas en Scylle,  
 Si tu ne sçais nager d’une voile à tout vent. R26 vv. 12–14



Here, in the final stanza, the poet sets his reader on an Odyssean itinerary that takes him past the Sirens, through Scylla and Charybdis, and on to an almost certain doom.<sup>33</sup> Verse 13 is widely recognized as an allusion to Erasmus' adage 404 *Evitata Charybdi in Scyllam incidi* which can mean either to pick your poison, or to go from bad to worse. The related adage 3706 *Extra fumum et undam* cites Aristotle's allegorical reading of Homer's episode as a paradigm of moderation and avoidance of extremes.<sup>34</sup> The saying *aller de Scylle en Carybde* had already achieved a vernacular currency by the time of François Rabelais' *Quart Livre*, published in 1552, six years before the *Regrets*. When Panurge panics during the storm at sea in chapter 20, even his exaggerated terror does not obscure his commonplace memory; for, in the midst of an incoherent monologue, he proclaims, "Nous allons de Scylle en Caryde" (588). There may also be a reminiscence in R26 of Petrarch's sonnet "Passa la nave mia," in which the poet must navigate the harsh seas of love "in fra Scilla e Cariddi" (*Rime sparse* 189 v. 3). Thus, Du Bellay has adapted a typical motif of Petrarchan love poetry to the new context of court satire, with a mock epic motif in the manner of Rabelais, demonstrating a literary versatility which he hopes that his colleague will find exemplary.

In the final verse, the expression "a sail for all winds" ("une voile à tout vent") also has a proverbial allure, like "the man for all seasons" or *omnium horarum homo* of adage 286. To stay afloat in Rome requires an impossible finesse figured by the sail that shifts with all winds. This sail represents the qualities of versatility and amorality expressed by the adages *Proteo mutabilior* and *cothurno versatilior*, and it participates in the Renaissance fascination with timing. Moreover, it alludes to the adage *vela vertere* (860), which may mean simply to change course or, more problematically, to shift with the wind or to adapt to the circumstances.<sup>35</sup> Given the difficulty of finding the proper saying or precept to suit the variability of the Roman court, it is tempting to see in this "voile à tout vent" an emblem of the hollow ambition of proverbial speech. A paroemiographer, in prose or verse, seeks the right saying for every occasion; his stock of proverbs is his sail for all winds. Erasmus' *Adagiorum Chiliades* furnished the poet of the *Regrets* with a saying for every occasion as well as an occasion for measuring the utility of gnomic sayings. The "voile à tout vent" is Du Bellay's own coinage, and he uses it to expose the utopian ambitions of the commonplace tradition.

33 For an "epic" reading of sonnet 26, see Marc Bizer, *Homer and the Politics of Authority in Renaissance France* (New York, 2011) 88–90.

34 ASD II-8:131–132 referring to *Nicomachean Ethics* 1109a30–35.

35 Otto 1855: "Die Segel richten sich nach dem Winde, d. h. unsere Stimmungen und Gefühle ändern sich nach den Verhältnissen."



### Odious Praise

While proverbs constitute a conspicuous feature of Du Bellay's style in the *Regrets*, their source can be quite enigmatic. Some of these commonplaces, in other words, seem uncommon if not unique to the poems where they are cited. They may represent a sort of phantom circulation of sayings that no one else says. To reconstitute the tentative genealogy of these sayings, we can begin with a particularly enigmatic instance of proverbial speech from the end of R143, which is devoted to the distinction between satire and encomium. The poem appeals to the authority of an unidentifiable proverb in order to stress the difficulty of praise and blame, and this epideictic theme, which traverses Du Bellay's collection, can help us to identify the various sources or conduits of the poet's proverbial speech. As nearly always, Erasmus plays a key role in this circulation.

In sonnet 143, addressed to Odoard Bizet, the poet claims to choose encomium over satire. He would rather err on the side of praise than make enemies in verse.

Bizet, j'aymerois mieulx faire un boeuf d'un formy,  
Ou faire d'une mousche un Indique elephant,  
Que le bon heur d'autrui par mes vers estoufant,  
Me faire d'un chacun le publiq ennemy. R143 vv. 1–4

Though he professes concern for "le bonheur d'autrui," the poet here seems primarily concerned with his own safety. Verse two corresponds to adage 869 *Elephantum ex musca facis*, which is one of the figures of speech that Erasmus uses in *The Praise of Folly* to designate the flatterer (ASD IV-3:74). Given this precedent, the poet of *Les Regrets* here seems to identify himself with the "trafiqueurs d'honneurs" whom he scorns elsewhere (R183). He also adapts the terms of Plutarch's treatise on how to tell a flatterer from a friend to the context of court poetry. For, it is the flatterer who has more friends than the satirist as we learn in the next quatrain of sonnet 143:

Souvent par un bon mot on perd un bon amy,  
Et tel par ses bons motz croit (tant il est enfant)  
S'estre mis sur la teste un chapeau triomphant,  
A qui mieulx eust valu estre bien endormy. R143 vv. 5–8

Verse five alludes to a phrase in the *Institutio oratoria* where Quintilian discourages the use of humor against friends and disavows the perverse proposal sooner to lose a friend than a joke: "longe absit illud propositum, potius

amicum quam dictum perdendi" (6.3.28). The poet of R143 claims to value friendship over humor or, in epideictic terms, praise over blame. At the same time, he seems to have rewritten Plutarch's treatise to answer the question, how to tell a satirist from a friend.

The rest of the sonnet concedes that praise is easier than satire and less offensive.

La louange Bizet est facile à chacun,  
Mais la stayre n'est un ouvrage commun:  
C'est, trop plus qu'on ne pense, un oeuvre industrieux. R143 vv. 9–12

Earlier, the poet seemed to think that it was easier to please an audience through satire than praise, since the unidentified wit Marc Antoine can make you die laughing (R76), but now he recognizes the burden of such fatal laughter. The final verses of the poem invoke, as usual, a proverb, signaled by the parenthetical "comme on dit":

Il n'est rien si fascheux qu'un brocard mal plaisant,  
Et fault bien (comme on dit) bien dire en mesdisant,  
Veu que le loüier mesme est souvent odieux. R143 vv. 12–14

It is not clear who if anyone admonished the poet to speak well when speaking ill, nor what the advice may mean. One critic understands the formula *bien dire en mesdisant* to privilege truth over slander, assuming an unlikely equivalence between *bien dire* and *dire vrai*.<sup>36</sup> Alternately, verse 13 may simply mean that slander has its own eloquence and that we should observe the rules of rhetoric governing vituperation. This pseudo proverb *bien dire en mesdisant* creates a tension between ethics and esthetics that may be seen to pervade the genre of epideictic. *Bien dire en mesdisant*, like *festina lente*, seems to advocate a delicate if not impossible balance between opposite impulses that need to neutralize each other. The satirist must know how to praise and the panegyrist how to satirize. This type of versatility is not exempt from amorality, since the formula *bien dire en mesdisant* insinuates the need to disguise blame with a veneer of praise. In this sense, the poet advocates a dubious art of duplicity, reminiscent of the *duplices viros* of adage 2012, who mask foul intentions with fair words. The ostensibly proverbial requirement of duplicity is in turn related to the final paradox, expressed aphoristically, of odious praise: "veu que le

36 Pascal Debailly, *La Muse indignée*. Tome I *La satire en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 2012) 396.

loüer mesme est souvent odieux.” How can praise be odious? Certainly, praise can be odious when it is recognized as blame in disguise.

Moreover, self-praise can be an affront to others, as the poet recognizes in R146:

Nous oston bien souvent aux princes le courage  
De nous faire du bien: nous rendant odieux,  
Soit pour en demandant estre trop ennuyeux,  
Soit pour trop nous loüant aux autres faire outrage. R146 vv. 5–8

This last verse opens a particularly rich vein in the paroemiographic tradition, one dedicated to the outrage of self-praise. Many years ago, in his supplement to August Otto’s collection of Roman proverbs, Carl Weyman catalogued the topos of odious self-praise among Latin writers,<sup>37</sup> including a passage from the late-antique Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, where Emperor Constantius II indulges in “odiosa sui iactatione” (16.12.69), spurred on by the flattery of his courtiers, who enflame his jealousy of Julian’s success at war. The emperor’s self-praise is a kind of usurpation since it diverts praise from the one who earned it, and Ammianus’ readers know that Julian will soon supplant his rival, adding an ominous cast to self-praise. The phrase *odiosa iactatio* may already have been a quotation by Ammianus’ time (floruit circa 400), since the Bishop of Carthage, Saint Cyprian uses it in a treatise addressed to Donatus from the middle of the third century. Rather than vaunt his own conversion to Christianity, Cyprian remembers the stricture against self-praise: “In proprias laudes odiosa iactatio est” (*Ad Donatum* 4).<sup>38</sup> The lesser known patristic writer Ruricius of Limoges cites Cyprian’s turn of phrase in one of his own letters, where he develops the conceit, congenial to Montaigne, that a friend is another self, from which he infers a paradoxical prohibition against praising friends, lest one yield to the odious appeal of self-praise: I will not praise you, he tells his friends Namatius and Ceraunia, “quia in propriis laudibus, sicut dicitur, est odiosa iactatio” (*Epistulae* 2.1).<sup>39</sup> Erasmus was well qualified to assimilate this pagan-Christian topos since he did an edition with commentary of St. Cyprian, and in his correspondence, he praises Cyprian for his rhetorical

37 Carl Weyman, “Zu den Sprichwörtern und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer” in *Nachträge zu A. Otto*, ed. Reinhard Häussler (Hildesheim, 1968) 67–68.

38 *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera*, pars secunda *Ad Donatum*, ed. Manlio Simonetti (Turnhout, 1976) 5.

39 *Ruricii Lemovicensis Epistularum Libri Duo*, ed. R. Demeulenaere (Turnhout, 1985) 332.

talents, which naturally include a genius for proverbs. Therefore the genealogy of odious praise leads us from the patristic writers to Erasmus and Du Bellay.

One of the most odious praises of the Renaissance was the *Praise of Folly*, which earned its author the hatred of professional theologians. In a letter of September 1514, Martin Dorp informs Erasmus of the reaction of the faculty of theology at the University of Louvain to his “infausta Moria” or ill-omened Folly. He asks Erasmus if it is not madness to proclaim an odious truth: “Etiam si verissima scripserit, nonne dementiae est nihil aliud se fatigando quam odium querere?” (Allen 2:12). In his answer to Dorp, as in his preface to Thomas More, Erasmus disavows any aggressive intentions in the *Moria*: “Admonere volumus, non mordere.” He even goes so far as to say that he would rather praise the undeserving than blame the meritorious.<sup>40</sup> This exemplary meekness is not calculated to appease the critics, since undeserved praise can also prove odious, as the poet of the *Regrets* recognizes.

The final section of the *Regrets*, comprising nearly a third of the collection, is an exercise in epideictic rhetoric. Here, to the chagrin of many critics, the poet lavishes praise on the powerful figures of the court of Henri II, reserving his most extravagant encomia for the sister of the king, Marguerite de France. “Cette soixantaine de sonnets courtisans,” as Michael Screech called them dismissively in the introduction to his edition, seem to mar the unity of a work esteemed for its elegiac and satiric impulses.<sup>41</sup> This unity may be easier to admit if we recognize the importance of Erasmus’ epideictic satire as a model for the *Regrets*. Among these fulsome tributes, there is a pair of sonnets, R182 and R183, that explore the ethics and the economics of praise, giving vent to a rather ironic indignation toward a class of authors whom the poet designates as vendors of praise. In these poems, the poet of the *Regrets* rehearses the role of Moria, the speaker of the *Encomium Moriae* who revels in *odiosa iactatio*. In the prologue to her speech, Moria announces that she will play the sophist, and she reminds us that sophists were the experts of encomiastic rhetoric. Like a sophist, Folly will deliver a speech of praise; but in defiance of conventional wisdom, she will praise herself (ASD IV-3:72). Confounding the expectations of her audience, she declares that it is more modest to praise yourself than to hire some vain poet or fawning rhetor to sing your praises, that is to say, to

40 “Malo in hanc peccare partem ut vel parum meritos praedicem, quam ut meritos vituperem” Allen 2:93.

41 Du Bellay, *Les Regrets* 30. Jean Vignes surveys what he calls “l’étrange fortune critique de ce bouquet final” while arguing for “la profonde cohérence des *Regrets*” in his very important article “Deux études sur la structure des *Regrets*” in *Du Bellay et ses sonnets romains*, ed. Yvonne Bellenger (Paris, 1994) 87–136.

recite mere lies. The wise and the powerful puff themselves out like peacocks when some impudent flatterer compares them to the gods, or proposes them as the absolute model of all virtues, which is, as it were, to whiten an Ethiopian, to make a fly into an elephant, or even to dress a crow in borrowed feathers.<sup>42</sup> Of these three figures of speech, the first two appear in Erasmus' *Adagia* (350 and 869) while the last two are cited in the *Regrets* (R143 and R183), and all three of them evoke the distorting effects of praise. The impudent scorn which Folly shows for the patrons and purveyors of praise resonates in Du Bellay's own verse.

In the *Regrets*, sonnet 182 begins with a declaration of epideictic scruples. The poet will neither deny praise to the worthy nor accord it to the unworthy.

Je ne suis pas de ceulx qui ro bent la louange,  
 Fraudant indignement les hommes de valeur,  
 Ou qui changeant la noire à la blanche couleur  
 Sçavent, comme lon dit, faire d'un diable un ange. R182 vv. 1–4

In verse 3, the expression “changer la noire à la blanche couleur” recalls the humanist adage cited by Folly, *Aethiopem dealbas*, which Erasmus takes to be a metaphor for the abuse of epideictic rhetoric: “Hoc item peculiariter quadrabit cum res parum honesta verborum fucis adornatur, aut cum laudatur illaudatus” (ASD II-1:448).<sup>43</sup> To change black to white, or to make an angel of a devil, is to praise the unpraised, *illaudatus*, in the sense of that which cannot be praised, that which goes beyond the pale of praise. Like Folly, the poet will not stoop to such odious praise. Du Bellay is so fond of the exculpatory phrase, “je ne suis pas de ceux,” that he repeats it in the “Hymne de la surdité” from his *Divers jeux rustiques*, which were published if not written at the same time as the *Regrets*.

42 “Quanquam ego hoc alioqui non paulo etiam modestius arbitror quam id quod optimum ac sapientum vulgus facit, qui perverso quodam pudore vel Rhetorem quenquam palponem vel poetam vaniloquum subornare solent eumque mercede conductum, a quo suas laudes audiant, hoc est, mera mendacia; et tamen verecundus interim ille pavonis in morem pennas tollit, cristas erigit, cum impudens assentator nihili hominem diis aequiparat, cum absolutum omnium virtutum exemplar proponit, a quo sciat ille se plus quam δις διὰ πασῶν abesse, cum corniculam alienis convestit plumis, cum τὸν αἰθίοπα λευκαίνει, denique cum ἐκ μυίας τὸν ἐλέφαντα ποιεῖ” ASD IV-3:72–74. Robert Burton paraphrases this passage in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* 1.2.3.14

43 “This will be particularly apposite when a matter of doubtful morality is decorated by a gloss of words, or when praise is given to one who does not deserve praise” CWE 31:357.

Je ne suis pas de ceux qui d'un vers triomphant  
 Déguisent une mouche en forme d'éléphant,  
 Et qui de leurs cerveaux couchent à toute reste,  
 Pour louer la folie ou pour louer la peste:  
 Mais sans changer la blanche à la noire couleur,  
 Et soubz nom de plaisir déguiser la douleur,  
 Je diray qu'estre sourd (à qui la différence  
 Sçait du bien et du mal) n'est mal qu'en apparence. vv. 29–36<sup>44</sup>

In these verses we can recognize the classical adage *Elephantum ex musca facere* and the vernacular saying “changer la noire à la blanche couleur” in the context of a dubious disavowal of paradoxical encomium. The poet is not one of those who praise folly or the plague, trite themes by the middle of the sixteenth century, but he will praise deafness. If the poet of the hymn disavows paradoxical praise, while practicing it, the poet of R182 disavows mercenary praise:

Je ne fay point valoir, comme un tresor estrange,  
 Ce que vantent si hault noz marcadants d'honneur,  
 Et si ne cherche point que quelque grand seigneur  
 Me baille pour des vers des biens en contr'eschange. R182 vv. 5–8

The scornful expression “noz marcadants d'honneur” to designate court poets may recall Folly's use of the epithet “poetam vaniloquum mercede conductum” to designate a similar profession. Like Folly, the poet of the *Regrets* only wants to give praise in order to receive it. He explains to his correspondent Gournay that her admirers praise Marguerite de France not to win vulgar profit but to earn their own praise: “Car en loüant (Gournay) si loüable subject, Le loz que je m'acquier, m'est trop grand'recompense” (R182 vv. 13–14). So the *Regrets* are an exercise in self-praise, which, for a disciple of Folly, is the most disinterested form of praise.

Sonnet 183 forms a sequel to 182 in its critique of hired praise. If one sonnet denounces “noz marcadants d'honneur,” the other decries “noz trafiqueurs d'honneurs”:

Morel, quand quelquefois je perds le temps à lire  
 Ce que font aujourd'hui noz trafiqueurs d'honneurs,  
 Je ry de voir ainsi desguiser ces Seigneurs,  
 Desquelz (comme lon dit) ilz font comme de cire R183 vv. 1–4

44 Joachim Du Bellay, *Divers jeux rustiques*, ed. V.L. Saulnier (Geneva, 1947) 177.

The facility with which such merchants of praise disguise undeserving lords as paragons of virtue reminds the skeptical poet of a phrase from Rabelais' second novel, *Gargantua*, which was first published in 1535. When Gargantua steals the bells of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, Janotus de Bragmardo is deputed by the faculty of theology to recover the bells through the force of his peculiar eloquence. At the close of his oration, in order to extol the sanctity of the bells, Janotus reminds his audience that someone who once complained about their noise was declared a heretic. On behalf of his fellow theologians he boasts: "Nous les faisons comme de cire" (53). It appears that poets dispense praise no less arbitrarily than theologians denounce heresy, and both invite the scrutiny of satire.

The merchants of praise offer their wares to the highest bidder, but when the bidder has no other qualification than wealth, he only purchases ridicule.

Et qui pourroit, bons dieux! se contenir de rire  
 Voyant un corbeau peint de diverses couleurs,  
 Un pourceau couronné de roses et de fleurs,  
 Ou le pourtrait d'un asne accordant une lyre? R183 vv. 5–8

Criticism has had little trouble in recognizing the Erasmian antecedents of these proverbial images of incongruity. The pig crowned with roses comes from adage 2623 *Sus per rosas* while *Asinus ad lyram* is the title of adage 335, one of Erasmus' most prized sayings. The ass at the lyre, he reminds us, is a figure of those who have no judgment or those who have a bad ear: "In eos, qui propter imperitiam nullo sunt iudicio crassisque auribus" (ASD II-1:434–45). Praise, like music, requires a cultivated listener. The first of the three proverbial images in the second stanza of R183, "un corbeau peint de diverses couleurs," comes from Horace's *Epistles*, where it stands for the plagiarist who borrows his feathers from other writers. In Du Bellay's epistolary sonnet, the crow represents another type of theft, the theft of praise. Between Horace and Du Bellay, it is Folly who appeals to the Horatian crow in the prologue to her speech where she expounds her novel theory of praise. Du Bellay has taken the Horatian figure of borrowed feathers and adapted it to the Erasmian theme of hired praise. In the process he may well have consulted one of Erasmus' favorite sources, namely Angelo Poliziano's *epistolario*.<sup>45</sup>

While the quatrains of 183 disparage praise as a "trafic," the tercets advertise praise as a genuine tribute. Praise should be reserved for those who can wear it without disguise, the poet remarks ingratiatingly, and so he will sing only of Marguerite de France:

45 See above page 23.



La loüange, à qui n'a rien de loüable en soy,  
 Ne sert que de le faire à tous monstrier au doy,  
 Mais elle est le loyer de cil qui la merite.  
 C'est ce qui fait (Morel) que si mal voluntiers  
 Je diz ceulx dont le nom fait rougir les papiers,  
 Et que j'ay si frequent celuy de Marguerite. R183 vv. 9–14

These verses can help us to gloss the paradox of odious praise, since they remind us that, when misdirected, praise becomes the most effective form of blame: “La loüange, à qui n'a rien de loüable en soy, Ne sert que de le faire à tous monstrier au doy.” This epideictic principle enlists yet another Erasmian adage, number 943 *Digito monstrari*, whose first and foremost meaning is to be famous. Erasmus illustrates this primary meaning with a verse from the Roman satirist Persius, where the poet assumes the voice of a vainglorious author who likes to be pointed out in a crowd: “At pulchrum est digito monstrari et dicier ‘hic est’” (*Saturae* 1.28). This eagerness for praise evokes the poet’s disdain. In this satiric instance, where he who covets praise earns blame, we can say that praise already carries within it the seed of blame. Erasmus’ commentary on *Digito monstrari* borrows from Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of the Philosophers* an anecdote about Diogenes the Cynic, who pointed to the orator Demosthenes with his middle finger, indicating that Demosthenes was both vainglorious and immoral (ASD II-2:450). It seems to be this latter meaning of infamy that the poet of R183 recovers when he says “faire montrer au doigt.” Hired praise is like Diogenes’ middle finger, signifying blame. In effect, praise and blame can easily exchange roles, more easily than the fly and the elephant, and this role reversal is one of the lessons of *The Praise of Folly*. Perhaps this reversibility of praise and blame can help to gloss the mysterious proverb “bien dire en mesdisant” from sonnet 143. Given the proximity of satire and encomium, we cannot help but praise in blaming or blame in praising.

In this way we can see how the innocuous, prosaic interjection, “comme on dit” conceals a very circuitous process of transmission from classical poetry through the humanist miscellany to vernacular verse. The same phrase also raises some interesting issues of timing, since the gnomic present tense purports to be timeless. The poet of the *Regrets* is convinced that the sayings of the past are still current, and he expects us to recognize the voices of Terence, Horace, Persius, and Juvenal in his own verses. This attitude is largely indebted to Erasmus’ *Adages*. In the *Prolegomena* to the adages, first published in 1508, Erasmus defines the proverb as a saying suited to the times and the circumstances: “accommodatum rebus temporibusque proverbium” (ASD II-1:45). If a saying is not timely, it is not a proverb, and yet the proverb purports to be



timeless. Section seven of the *Prolegomena*, on the persuasive power of proverbs, insists that adages have the endurance of truth, which is why they outlast the pyramids and never grow old.

There is, and I say it again, in these proverbs some native authentic power of truth. Otherwise how could it happen that we should frequently find the same thought spread abroad among a hundred peoples, transposed into a hundred languages, a thought which has not perished or grown old even with the passing of so many centuries, which pyramids themselves have not withstood?<sup>46</sup> CWE 31:17

In effect, proverbs are the hardest ruins of antiquity; they outlast monuments in stone or bronze. Here we can readily recognize an echo of Horace's theme of *Exegi monumentum* (*Carmina* 3.30) which expresses the poetic ambition to create a literary monument that will outlast the pyramids. Far from being anti-lyrical or prosaic, proverbs express the most exalted ambition of the lyric tradition, the triumph over time. Perhaps this ambition may constitute an affinity between Du Bellay's two best known sonnet sequences: *Les Antiquitez de Rome*, which meditate on the ruins of the ancient city, and *Les Regrets*, which revive the ruins of the ancient gnomic tradition.

If we return to the metaphor of the gem in its setting, we can see that the gem is bound to outlast its own setting. Consequently, it must periodically be reset: proverbs outlast their literary context and must be integrated into new contexts. This is the work of humanist compilers, who collect and classify these gems in their purest atemporal form, and of poets and prose writers who put them back into circulation in new settings. This process reintroduces these sayings into the temporal flow of language, where they become, in Thomas Greene's parlance, "vulnerable" but also revitalized. We can see a mimesis of this process in Rabelais' famous frozen words.

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46 "Inest nimirum, inest in his paroemiis nativa quaedam et genuina vis veritatis. Alioquin qui fieri potuit, ut eandem plerunque sententiam in centum dimanasse populos, in centum videamus transfusam linguas, quae ne tot quidem seculis, quibus nec pyramides obstiterunt, vel interierit vel consenuerit?" ASD II-1:64.

## Words Frozen and Thawed

### Frozen Words

“Rabelais’s comic narratives seem at times to be the fictional equivalent of a commonplace-book,” observed Terence Cave in an article for a volume in honor of Ann Moss, whose research has contributed so much to our understanding of commonplace culture.<sup>1</sup> The ostentatious erudition of Rabelais’ giants and their entourage is generously nourished by the commonplace tradition conserved in ancient and modern lexicons, miscellanies, and compilations. Michael Screech has shown how Rabelais uses legal commonplaces in his novels,<sup>2</sup> while Cave is interested in how Rabelais depicts his characters thinking with commonplaces rather than merely reciting them uncritically. What interests me are those moments where Rabelais’ text seems to enact or to demonstrate the commonplace method which it shares with its ambient culture. Rabelais discovered a potent metaphor for the circulation of commonplaces in the exotic yet well documented phenomenon of frozen words.

The episode of the “paroles gelées” has provoked the most widely divergent readings and seems to sponsor with equal authority starkly incompatible critical approaches to Rabelais’ novel.<sup>3</sup> One secret to the enduring appeal of this episode is that it seems to be about how we read books, including the *Quart Livre*. As critics, we all fancy ourselves the hero of Rabelais’ hermeneutic adventure novel, engaged in deciphering enigmatic signs in our quest for meaning. Far be it from me to derogate from this revered trend. Like so many commentators before me, I congratulate Rabelais for having anticipated my own ideas and for dramatizing them so effectively. I propose to read in the freezing and thawing of words portrayed in chapters 55 and 56 of the *Quart*

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1 Terence Cave, “Thinking with Commonplaces: the example of Rabelais” in *(Re)Inventing the Past: Essays in honour of Ann Moss*, ed. Gary Ferguson and Catherine Hampton (Durham, 2003) 35–49.

2 Michael Screech, “Commonplaces of Law, Proverbial Wisdom and Philosophy: Their Importance in Renaissance Scholarship (Rabelais, Joachim du Bellay, Montaigne)” in *Classical Influences on European Culture A.D. 1500–1700*, ed. R.R. Bolgar (Cambridge, 1976) 127–134.

3 For a sample of some of these opposing views, see Tonino Tornitore, “Interpretazioni novecentesche dell’episodio delle *Parolles Gelées*,” *Etudes Rabelaisiennes* 18 (1985) 179–204.

*Livre* a model and a metaphor for the collection, transmission, and dispersion of commonplaces in Renaissance humanism.

The frozen words that Pantagruel and his companions scrutinize as they approach the confines of the glacial sea have been likened to what linguists call “formes figées” or fixed sayings such as proverbs and other figurative locutions.<sup>4</sup> Their thawing out in milder weather can then be understood as their poetic liberation or revitalization. For François Rigolot, Rabelais’ treatment of “paroles gelées” shows us how frozen sayings come to life in works of imaginative fiction: “Paroles gelées dans l’hors-texte, le proverbe et la sentence entrent dans le texte pour ‘rendre son en degelant’, pour s’actualiser et donc reprendre vie.”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, these sayings cannot be conserved unless they are stored in dictionaries, anthologies, and other forms of refrigeration. Literary tradition is an alternating process of thawing and freezing, and since each stage of this process depends on the other, their relation cannot be understood as strictly antagonistic. The *paroles gelées* enact both stages of the process and thereby draw attention to their author’s method of composition as a humanist compiler who is also an alchemist of language.

At the outset of this episode, which forms an interlude between two dangerous encounters with literalism, namely with the Decretalists, who worship the Pope, and the Gastrolâtres, who worship their stomach, Pantagruel gets up from the deck of the ship, where his companions are banqueting, to take a look around. At this point, he announces that he can hear people talking in the air: “Compaignons, oyez vous rien? Me semble que je oy quelques gens parlans en l’air, je n’y voy toutesfoys personne. Escoutez” (667).<sup>6</sup> “Parler en l’air” was recognized as a play on words by Leo Spitzer and as a Biblical allusion by Paul Smith, who points to a verse from St. Paul’s first Epistle to the Corinthians.<sup>7</sup> In chapter 14 the apostle exhorts his audience to follow charity and to cultivate spiritual gifts, especially prophecy or *προφητεία*, which is usually understood to mean a form of intelligible communication that Christians should prefer to speaking in tongues or *λαλεῖν γλώσσαις*. While prophecy builds community, speaking in

4 See Gabriella Adamo, “Su alcuni *détournements* di *formes figées* in Rabelais” in *La langue de Rabelais. La langue de Montaigne*, ed. Franco Giaccone (Geneva, 2009) 127–143 and Maria Proshina, “Détournement proverbial dans le *Quart Livre*” in *Langue et sens du Quart Livre*, ed. Franco Giaccone (Paris, 2012) 69–82.

5 François Rigolot, “Sémiotique de la sentence et du proverbe chez Rabelais,” *Etudes Rabelaisiennes* 14 (1977) 277–286.

6 All citations of Rabelais are taken from François Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Mireille Huchon (Paris, 1994).

7 Leo Spitzer, “Rabelais et les ‘Rabelaisants,’” *Studi Francesi* 4 (1960) 405; Paul J. Smith, *Voyage et écriture: étude sur le Quart Livre de Rabelais* (Geneva, 1987) 13.

tongues does not, and so Paul reminds the Corinthians that unless they speak intelligibly, they will be speaking in the air: “Eritis enim in aerem loquentes” in Erasmus’ version (ASD VI-3:302 from I Cor. 14.9). So when Pantagruel hears people speaking in the air, we may suspect that the Pantagruelistes have run across some expatriate Corinthians who haven’t taken the apostle’s preaching to heart. This initial quotation from Paul reintroduces the theme of charity and gives the episode an evangelical orientation that keeps it from drifting away from the main path of the narrative.

At the same time, this initial quotation puts the episode under the auspices of the commonplace. The words in the air that surprise the Pantagruelistes on the border of the northern sea are vestiges of the past, remains of the classical tradition that must be retrieved, catalogued, and identified by humanist scholarship. Pantagruel performs this task when he tries to explain the eerie phenomenon of words in the air that so unnerves his companions. According to the most authoritative tendency of humanist pedagogy, Pantagruel proposes a series of examples of disembodied speech culled from the classical tradition and susceptible of explaining the new experience confronting the travelers. His examples are the *logoi* or *Parolles* that reside at the center of the abode of truth according to the Pythagorean philosopher Petron as reported in Plutarch’s *De defectu oraculorum*, the moving words for which Aristotle admires Homer, Antiphanes’ joke of the frozen words that recalls Plato’s teaching in Plutarch’s *De profectibus in virtute*, and the myth of Orpheus, whose disembodied head continues to sing as it floats on the river Hebrus (668–669). The four examples that Rabelais compiles here are themselves drawn from compilations, especially from Plutarch’s *Moralia*, which is one of the most capacious collections of commonplaces available to Renaissance culture.<sup>8</sup> Criticism has moved the fairly idle question of whether Pantagruel is right or wrong, inspired or obtuse in his explanations.<sup>9</sup> The giant may be an impenitent Platonist, a meddling metaphysician, a remorseless allegorist, but above all he is a humanist with a commonplace notebook who wants to find the right *locus* or place for the

8 For Rabelais and Plutarch, see Romain Menini, “L’influence des ‘moraulx de Plutarque’ sur le *Quart Livre*” in *Langue et sens du Quart Livre* 183–206.

9 Reacting to Michel Jeanneret, “Les paroles dégelées (Rabelais, *Quart Livre*, 48–65),” *Littérature* 17 (1975) 14–30, Gérard Defaux disputes Pantagruel’s hermeneutic skills in “Vers une définition de l’herméneutique rabelaisienne: Pantagruel, l’esprit, la lettre et les paroles gelées” in *Rabelais en son demi-millénaire*, ed. Jean Céard and Jean-Claude Margolin (Geneva, 1988) 327–337. For Defaux, “les quatre hypothèses qu’il propose successivement, si elles témoignent de l’étendue et de l’esprit de sa culture, se révèlent toutes inopérantes, sans prise aucune sur la réalité observée” (332).

occasion. As Gérard Defaux has noticed, his method is cumulative rather than selective: he assumes that if he offers enough examples, one of them ought to be relevant.<sup>10</sup>

The first act of the comedy of the frozen words shows us the compiler at work as he congeals and conserves the traces of classical learning. There is nothing culpable about his effort since it is through this process of congelation that classical scholarship solidifies what would otherwise evaporate or melt away. Only through such painstaking effort can we grasp the transience and evasiveness of language. However, congelation is not an end in itself. What scholarship freezes and collects, literature must then thaw out and recirculate. Chapter 56 of the *Quart Livre* enacts this second phase of the cycle through the dialogue between Panurge, Pantagruel, and Frère Jean.

Panurge initiates the comically sententious conversation by asking to see some of the frozen words, thus betraying a lamentable literalism of the sort that Erasmus labels *judaismus*.<sup>11</sup> Indulging Panurge's curiosity without any traces of the indignation we hear from pious critics, Pantagruel obliges his companion by throwing handfuls of words on the deck, which are described according to their colors in the language of heraldry.

“Tenez tenez (dist Pantagruel) voyez en cy qui encores ne sont dege-  
lées.” Lors nous jecta sus le tillac plenes mains de parolles gelées, et sem-  
bloient dragée perlée de diverses couleurs. Nous y veismes des motz de  
gueule, des motz de sinople, des motz de azur, des motz de sable, des  
motz d'orez. Les quelz estre quelque peu eschauffez entre nos mains fon-  
doient, comme neiges, et les oyons realement. 670

The heraldic designations such as “mots de gueule” allow for a play on words that exploits the double status of words as both the object and the medium of description.<sup>12</sup> The most interesting *double entendre* may be the “mots dorés” or golden sayings, which was the customary vernacular title of the collection

10 Evaluating Pantagruel's speech in light of Montaigne's critique of causal reasoning in “Des Coches,” Defaux says of Rabelais' giant: “Incapable de rendre compte, de situer la ‘maistresse cause,’ il en entasse donc, lui aussi, plusieurs, passant de l'une à l'autre sans vraiment croire à ce qu'il dit” (335). Defaux is unduly skeptical here of a method which he himself practiced diligently.

11 See David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature* (New Haven, 1983) 189–190. Erasmus uses the term most insistently in the *Enchiridion*.

12 According to André Tournon, “*En sens agile*” (Paris, 1995) 9–16, these “mots de gueule” can mean either red words or affectionate insults that are exchanged in the spirit of conviviality that Rabelais' text expects from its readers.

known in Latin as *Disticha Catonis*, of which Erasmus himself prepared an edition and to which he refers glancingly in his adages (ASD II-1:295) as well as his correspondence (Allen 2:1–3).<sup>13</sup> In other words, Pantagruel has loaded the deck of the ship with a pile of morally edifying sayings, which the other characters eagerly handle until they become audible. This manipulation can serve as a paradigm for the circulation of commonplaces in fictional dialogue. The notion of *aurea dicta* has further resonances for readers of Lucretius, who hails in these terms the teachings of Epicurus which he has put into Latin verse for a Roman audience (*De rerum natura* 3.12). Book three of the *De rerum natura* opens with an invocation to Epicurus, “pater, rerum inventor,” from whose flowering pages the poet samples all the golden sayings just as bees drink from all the flowers (3.10–13). The apian metaphor and the flowering fields evoke the familiar esthetic of variety proclaimed by humanist compilers. As a vehicle for *mots dorés*, Lucretius’ poem offers a model of the transmission of classical sayings to a modern audience.

When the first batch has melted, Panurge asks Pantagruel to hand over some more words, and so the giant delivers a few proverbs with commentary.

Panurge requist Pantagruel luy en donner encores. Pantagruel luy respondit que donner parolles estoit acte des amoureux. “Vendez m’en doncques, disoit Panurge.

—C’est acte de advocatz, respondit Pantagruel, vendre parolles. Je vous vendroys plustost silence et plus cherement, ainsi que quelques foyz la vendit Demosthenes moyennant son argentangine.” Ce nonobstant il en jecta sus le tillac troys ou quatre poignées. 670

In this passage, Rabelais cites two adages from Erasmus’ first *Chiliad*: *dare verba* (449), which means to deceive, and *Argentanginam patitur* (619) or to accept a bribe to keep silent. These two sayings about verbal exchange and negotiation seem naturally suited to dialogue and convivial repartee. Frozen in the archives of scholarship, they acquire a cordial fluidity in the friendly banter of the Pantagruelists. Which is why it is disconcerting for the narrator to intervene at this point with a perverse desire to conserve the thawing words: “Je vouloys quelques motz de gueule mettre en reserve dedans de l’huile comme l’on garde la neige et la glace, et entre du feurre bien nect”

13 This latter reference is to epistle 298, in which Erasmus dedicates his *Opuscula aliquot* of 1514 to Jan de Neve. He downplays his interest in the *Disticha* in epistle 421 addressed to Guillaume Budé, who judged such editorial efforts unworthy of a humanist.

(670). Pantagruel admonishes him sensibly that there is no reason to save what will never run out, for Pantagruelists are never at a loss for words. Why does he want to keep these exotic words cold, and where is he going to store them? In fact, we may see this odd first-person intervention as an announcement of the *Briefve declaration* or glossary where Rabelais collects the strange words of his text and preserves them in a lexical and bibliographical apparatus that represents another technique of refrigeration. From the episode of the “paroles gelées,” the *Briefve declaration* selects the word *Argentangine*, which seemed to Rabelais particularly worthy of conservation and, perhaps, of inspection. Guillaume Budé also recounts the anecdote about Demosthenes’ *argentangina* in his *Annotationes in Pandectas*, which may have encouraged Rabelais to fix the term in his glossary.<sup>14</sup> In this way, the *Quart Livre* resolutely enacts both phases of the cycle of freezing and thawing.

At this juncture we may recall Erasmus’ anxiety, first expressed in the preface to the *Collectanea* of 1500, that adages *per se* may leave us cold. The verb he uses is *frigere*: “Frigere quae piam videbuntur” (ASD II-9:46) or “separata frigent” (ASD II-5:32). Though this thermal property of adages may seem only tangentially related, if at all, to Rabelais’ “paroles gelées,” it is directly related to the rhetorical flaw known in Greek as τὸ ψυχρόν, in Latin as *frigus*, and in the vernacular as the cold style. Aristotle explains this stylistic flaw in book three, chapter three of the *Rhetoric*, where his examples seem to be drawn primarily from the sophists, who used poetic diction inopportunely in their prose orations (1405b34 to 1406a33). Citing Aristotle, Demetrius develops the category of *to psuchron* much further in his treatise on style, well known to the humanists, where he identifies coldness with neglect of decorum and even of *kairos*: πoίημα γὰρ ἀκαιρον ψυχρόν (*De elocutione* 118: an untimely poem is cold). To keep warm, speech must observe the principle of *καιρός* or *opportunitas* or timing. Erasmus for his part was confident that adages warm up and become graceful when used “in loco” (ASD II-9:46), that is both in the right place and at the right time. For frigid sayings to thaw out and come to life in the novel, the novelist must be a keen observer of timing.

14 Guillaume Budé, *Annotationes in Pandectas* (Paris, 1542) 280: “Demosthenes enim pecunia a Milesiis corruptus, cum postridie a concione flagitaretur ut in eos orationem haberet, excusavit synanchen, cum in concionem obvoluta cervice prodiisset. Unus atem ex turba suspicatus id quod erat, exclamavit non synanchen eum pati, sed argyranchen, quasi dicas argentanginam: quibus verbis significavit silentium Demosthenis pecunia a Milesiis redemptum.”



*Festina lente*

How does a commonplace become a fictional episode? The process begins in school. Erasmus' pedagogical treatise *De ratione studii*, published together with his *De copia* in 1512 and reissued constantly thereafter, emphasizes the role of commonplaces in the grammar school curriculum. After mastering the first elements of Latin grammar, students should immediately be given practice in writing and speaking, and this practice should involve themes or debating topics, such as "hasty counsel usually turns out bad" or "immoderate eloquence proved the downfall of Cicero and Demosthenes" (ASD 1-2:127). Besides themes, teachers should prompt their students with historical examples of the sort collected by Valerius Maximus, or myths, or Aesop's fables, or apophthegms, or proverbs, which shouldn't be hard to find since Erasmus has collected so many of them in his *Chiliades*, or sentences, or figures of speech, or ideally some combination of these items (ASD 1-2:127–128). This passage from the *De ratione studii* offers a handy inventory of the various forms which are known collectively as commonplaces and which formed the basis of some of Erasmus' most popular and influential compilations including his *Adagia*, *Apophthegmata*, and *Paraboliae*. Accordingly, Erasmus encourages the teacher to collect all these resources of rhetorical education in a *florilegium* or commonplace book for the benefit of his students (ASD 1-2:129). The influence of the commonplace method, as many historians have documented, extends well beyond the grammar school classroom to all aspects of the storage and retrieval of information in early modern society.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the commonplace method has a poetic function. Particularly enterprising students like François Rabelais can use their themes and fables and adages not only to develop their linguistic capacities and to stock their memory but also to write a novel.

Chapter 33 of Rabelais' *Gargantua* is entitled "Comment certains gouverneurs de Picrochole, par conseil précipité, le mirent au dernier peril" (91). This is the famous council scene from the Picrocholine War, the longest episode of the novel, which comes between the hero's education and the founding of the Abby of Theleme. The council scene, where Picrochole and his lieutenants devise a preposterous scenario of global conquest, has been understood as a parody of François I's principle geo-political rival, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, whose extravagant territorial ambitions offer an inviting target for nationalist satire. At the same time, the chapter heading reminds us of the

15 See Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford, 1996) and Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know. Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven, 2010).



Erasmian antecedents of Rabelais' comedy, for Picrochole and his advisors enact one of the sample themes that the *De ratione studii* sets for its students: "praecipitata consilia parum foeliciter evenire solere" (ASD 1-2:127). Before Rabelais ever worked on this school theme, Erasmus had already developed it to what we might call Gargantuan proportions in his adage *festina lente*, which is the preeminent expression of the humanist ethic of timing. *Festina lente*, in Erasmus' estimation, is the king of proverbs, worthy of universal display and contemplation, and though it admonishes all of us, it is particularly apt for princes, whose rashness or sloth can ruin nations. "At vero principis vel unica cessatio semel praecipitatum consilium, Deum immortalem, quas tempestates nonnunquam excitat, quantas rerum humanarum ruinas secum trahit!" (ASD 11-3:8). The perilous danger of "praecipitatum consilium" reemerges in comic form in our scene from *Gargantua* where "conseil précipité" exposes Picrochole "au dernier peril." In fact the whole episode of Picrochole's council can be seen as a parody of the humanist doctrine of *festina lente*. Through a brilliant manipulation of time in language, Rabelais indulges his characters and his readers in a festival of imprudence and immature deliberation.

The episode begins with the appearance of a trio of advisors, "les duc de Menuail, comte Spadassin, et capitaine Merdaille," who hail Picrochole as a new Alexander: "Cyre aujourd'huy nous vous rendons le plus heureux, plus chevaleureux prince qui oncques feust depuis la mort de Alexandre Macedo" (91). While this salutation, as others have noted,<sup>16</sup> initiates a parody of Charles V, who aspired to imitate Alexander the Great, it also raises the larger question of the uses of history, or the presence of the past. By appealing to his spirit of emulation, Picrochole's advisors catch him in the trap of exemplarity, that is in the effort to model himself on an historical figure presumed to possess a timeless, universal relevance.<sup>17</sup>

The exemplar theory of history, with its faith in the permanence of the past, is closely related to the humanist conception of prudence as the intellectual faculty that actualizes the lessons of history. Borrowing from Cicero (*De inventione* 2.160), Petrarch divided prudence into three parts, which correspond to three verbal tenses: "prudencia... diducitur in preteritorum memoriam,

16 Michael Screech, *Rabelais* (Ithaca, 1979) 165 ff.

17 For the exemplar theory of history, see Rüdiger Landfester, *Historia Magistra Vitae* (Geneva, 1972) and George Nadel, "Philosophy of History before Historicism," *History and Theory* 3 (1964) 291-315. For the role of exemplarity in Renaissance literature, see Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History* (Ithaca, 1990). For Alexander's ambiguous role as Renaissance exemplar, see David Quint, "'Alexander the Pig': Shakespeare on History and Poetry," *Boundary 2* (Spring, 1982) 49-67.

presentium intelligentiam et providentiam futurorum.”<sup>18</sup> Originating in *memoria*, which for Petrarch means Roman history, prudence comprehends the three phases of time in one simultaneous insight. Leonardo Bruni’s very influential formulation of the lessons of history from the treatise *De studiis et literis* recognizes the same transtemporal faculty in prudence, understood as a synonym for counsel:

For the knowledge of past events guides prudence and counsel, and the outcomes of similar undertakings either encourage us or discourage us according to the circumstances. Moreover, the abundance of examples with which it behooves us to adorn our own speech can be derived from no other source more conveniently than from history.<sup>19</sup>

Knowledge of the past furnishes us with examples to amend our conduct and enhance our speech. The reference to “*exemplorum copia*” reveals the almost metonymic association in humanist thought between prudence and exemplarity. Rabelais’ contemporary and compatriot Guillaume Budé gives vernacular expression to the humanist conception of prudence in his pedagogical treatise *De l’institution du prince*, which was written for François I: “prudence vient pour la plus part par expérience et par observation des exemples du temps passé dont histoire est le registre.”<sup>20</sup> History addresses its most precious lessons to kings, who need to learn from others’ mistakes, but the exploits of past rulers can just as easily lead their successors into a predicament as out of one. Picrochole, as an ambitious ruler, seems to be particularly vulnerable to the allure of the past.

Humanist enthusiasm for history as the teacher of prudence eventually provoked a challenge from the Christian humanists of the sixteenth century, who disapproved of the indiscriminate imitation of ancient exemplars. Erasmus warned against the dangers of exemplarity in his treatise on *The Education of a Christian Prince*:

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18 *Rerum memorandarum libri*, ed. G. Billanovich (Florence, 1945) 43.

19 Leonardo Bruni, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, ed. Paolo Viti (Turin, 1996) 262–64: “Dirigit enim prudentiam et consilium preteritorum notitia, exitusque similium ceptorum nos pro re nata aut hortantur aut deterrent. Preterea exemplorum copia, quibus plerumque illustrare dicta nostra oportet, non aliunde, quam ab historia, commodius sumetur.”

20 Cited in Marc Bizer, *Homer and the Politics of Authority in Renaissance France* (New York, 2011) 37.

When you hear of Achilles, Xerxes, Cyrus, Darius, or Julius, do not be at all overwhelmed by the enormous prestige of their names; you are hearing about great raging bandits, for that is what Seneca calls them several times. CWE 27:251<sup>21</sup>

In *Gargantua* this attitude is voiced by Grandgousier, who chastises Picrochole's conquering ambitions for their pagan inspiration:

C'est (dist Grandgousier) trop entreprint, qui trop embrasse peu estrainct. Le temps n'est plus d'ainsi conquerer les royaumes avecques dommaige de son prochain frere christian, ceste imitation des anciens Hercules, Alexandres, Hannibalz, Scipions, Cesars et aultres telz est contraire à la profession de l'evangile. . . . Et ce que les Sarazins et Barbares jadis appelloient prouesses, maintenant nous appellons briganderies, et mechantetez. 124

For Rabelais, as for his mentor Erasmus, emulation of Alexander and other classical conquerors is a moral anachronism. "Le temps n'est plus," exclaims Grandgousier, insisting on the discontinuity between *jadis* and *maintenant*. Yet, to introduce this lesson of historical change, he resorts to the intemporal mode of proverbial speech: "qui trop embrasse peu estrainct." Proverbs, like prudence, claim to stand outside of time in an eternal present, and so the proverbial critique of exemplarity leaves the issue of historical supersession unresolved.

Having lured Picrochole with the example of Alexander's conquests, Merdaille and his colleagues detail the military strategy that will win them world empire. First, Picrochole will divide his army into two parts, one of which will attack Grandgousier's troops and confiscate his enormous treasure: "Là recouvrerez argent à tas. Car le vilain en a du content, vilain, disons nous. Parce que un noble prince n'a jamais un sou. Thesaurizer est faict de vilain" (92). This is a good example of the type of sophistry that we are accustomed to hear from Rabelais' narrator and that Panurge will perfect in the *Tiers Livre*. The argument for attacking Grandgousier is based on a reverse-syllogism, which begins with the conclusion that Grandgousier is a "vilain" and concludes with the major premise that "thesaurizer est faict de vilain." This inductive fallacy, moving from a false fact to a hollow generalization, parodies the logic

21 "Cum Achillem audis, cum Xersem Cyrum Darium Iulium, ne quid te rapiat magni nominis praestigium. Magnos ac furiosos latrones audis. Sic enim illos aliquoties vocat Seneca" ASD IV-1:180.

of proverbs or maxims, which claim a permanent validity induced from past experience. The dubious “proof” of Grandgousier’s wealth and villainy not only discredits the ambitions that it claims to support but also hints at the speciousness of proverbial speech or any form of language that resists time.

The role of time in language becomes increasingly prominent as Picrochole’s counselors pursue their breathless plans of world conquest. To narrate their imaginary sequence of victories, they gradually shift from the future tense of hypothesis to the present tense of observation to the past tense of accomplishment. In this way, conjugation converts fantasy to fact.<sup>22</sup> This process is temporarily suspended when, having breathlessly pursued their verbal conquests to the Holy Land, Picrochole’s advisors unexpectedly restrain their impetuous sovereign from his rush to rebuild Solomon’s Temple. With belated prudence, they remind him of the proverb *festina lente*: “Non, dirent ilz, encores, attendez un peu: ne soyez jamais tant soubdain à vos entreprinses. Sçavez vous que disoit Octavian Auguste? *Festina lente*” (93). Indeed, Picrochole isn’t much of a king if he hasn’t heard of the adage that Erasmus considers worthy of the title “βασιλικόν id est regium” and on which the conscientious monarch must meditate if he wishes to preserve himself against the lures of flattery and bad advice (ASD II-3:8). Now flattery itself has appropriated this prestigious saying for its own purposes. It seems that Erasmus did not anticipate this particular tribute to his scholarship. What Erasmus admired above all in this royal saying is its mysterious succinctness, the “tam absoluta brevitās” which naturally results from its oxymoronic structure, “propterea quod constat ex verbis inter sese pugnantibus” (ASD II-3:7). In the *prolegomena* to his *Adages*, Erasmus identifies the oxymoron, or “contrariarum vocum contextus,” as a characteristic figure of proverbial speech and cites numerous examples including his personal favorite of *morosophos* or wise fool (ASD II-1:70–72). The essence of the oxymoron is its instantaneity, its ability to express meaning without any movement between the two contradictory terms. Through its internal equilibrium, the oxymoron resists the temporal progression of language and thus conforms to the intemporal mode of the proverb. In effect, an oxymoron makes haste slowly, and so *festina lente* is the paradigmatic proverb.

For Erasmus, *festina lente* is a concept of timing, of observing the “tempus legitimum” (ASD II-3:10). The best way to express this concept is instantaneously, either in a proverbial paradox or, more mysteriously, in a hieroglyph. As Erasmus remarks, and Rabelais remembers in *Gargantua* (29), the motto of

22 François Rigolot discusses this phenomenon in his *Langages de Rabelais* (Geneva, 1972) where he remarks: “Grâce au passé, une conquête aléatoire est devenue un fait accompli. Picrochole se sera rassasié d’espace par la magie du temps” (135).

*festina lente* expresses the same idea as the hieroglyphic emblem of a dolphin embracing an anchor (ASD II-3:10–12). To explain “monimenta literarum hieroglyphicarum,” Erasmus offers the example of the snake biting its tail whereby the Egyptians signified either “annum,” according to Servius, or “aevum,” according to Horapollon (whose *Hieroglyphica* Erasmus knew in a different form than the modern editions where Horapollon lists the serpent as a symbol of the universe),<sup>23</sup> but which in either case symbolizes time (ASD II-3:12). For the Florentine humanist Marsilio Ficino, writing a generation before Erasmus, the snake biting its tail epitomizes the mystery of hieroglyphic writing, which consists precisely in its instantaneous, non-sequential revelation of truth. Thus the circular snake is an emblem both of time and of intemporal representation.

Ficino expounds his influential if erroneous view of hieroglyphs in his commentary on the *Enneads* of Plotinus, a neo-Platonic philosopher of the third century.<sup>24</sup> In book 8 of the fifth of his six *Enneads*, Plotinus had likened the hieroglyph to the Platonic Idea as a non-discursive, intemporal *ousia* or “être.”<sup>25</sup> Ficino seizes on this neo-Platonic interpretation to make of the hieroglyph a semiotic mystery. Naturally, he chooses the example of the hieroglyph for time, the circular serpent, which he opposes to ordinary, discursive signification:

Your conception of time is multiple and mobile, saying for instance that time is swift and with one revolution it joins the beginning with the end: it teaches prudence, it brings something forth and bears it away. The Egyptian comprehends that whole discourse of time in one fixed image, by painting a winged serpent with its tail in its mouth.<sup>26</sup>

23 See *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollon*, trans. George Boas (Princeton, 1993) 43. Erasmus may simply have confused the symbol for the universe with the symbol for eternity or *aevum*, which can be represented by “a serpent with its tail concealed by the rest of its body” (Horapollon 43).

24 For two competing views of this commentary see E.H. Gombrich, “*Icones Symbolicae*: The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* (1949) 163–200 and Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (New Haven, 1958) 169–70. I have followed Gombrich’s interpretation as did André Chastel in *Marsilio Ficino et l’art* (Geneva, 1954) 147.

25 Plotin, *Ennéades*, ed. Emile Bréhier, vol. 5 (Paris, 1931) 141–42.

26 Ficino, *Opera omnia* (Basel, 1576) 1768 cited in Gombrich 172: “Excogitatio temporis apud te multiplex est et mobilis, dicens videlicet tempus quidem est velox, et revolutione quadam principium rursus cum fine coniungit: prudentiam docet, profert res, et auferit. Totam vero discursionem eiusmodi una quadam firmaque figura comprehendit Aegyptius alatum serpentem pingens, caudam ore praesentem.”

The oppositions established by this gloss on Plotinus situate the hieroglyphic sign outside of time. Whereas human speech is “multiplex et mobilis,” the hieroglyph is “una firmaque” or integral and immobile. Thus the hieroglyph does not participate in the sequential flow or *cursus* of discourse.<sup>27</sup> The circular snake is an apt example of this stasis especially since its tail is described as being *present* in its mouth, “caudam ore praesentem.” Unmoved by the flow of time, the hieroglyph for Ficino conveys a meaning that is eternally present.

The main flaw of *festina lente* is that it teaches an intemporal theory of timing. It advises us to choose the right time while ignoring the role of time in language. If we go back to the original source of humanist interest in *festina lente*, Aulus Gellius’ *Noctes Atticae*, we can appreciate the irony of prudential wisdom. Gellius devotes a brief chapter of his lengthy work to the word *mature*, where he reports Augustus’ oxymoronic motto in its Greek form, σπεῦδε βραδέως (10.11.5). While this is the passage that appealed most to humanist readers, Gellius’ interest here is not only in the ethic of timing but also in the movement of language through time. His chapter begins with the remark: “‘Mature’ nunc significat ‘propere’ et ‘cito’” whereas it used to signify “quod neque citius est neque serius, sed medium quiddam et temperatum est” (10.11.1–2). Though he clearly prefers the earlier meaning as more edifying than the current sense, he nevertheless recognizes that words change meaning over time. *Nunc* and *iam* are discontinuous for Gellius just as *jadis* and *maintenant* are for Grandgousier. Gellius, we might add, is more of a classicist than Grandgousier, who prefers *maintenant* to *jadis* for religious reasons. The evolution of the word *mature* documented in the *Noctes Atticae* demonstrates the crucial lesson that language cannot resist time, especially when it refers to time.

Since the very notion of timing has changed speed during the course of history, the ambition to master time through prudence and maturity is illusory. Prudence, which attempts to substitute simultaneous for sequential knowledge, achieves only stasis or suspension. Fortunately, the vitality of Rabelais’ style does not allow proverbial wisdom to enervate his foolish characters. Rushing on ahead with their imaginary army, Picrochole and his subordinates cross the Hircanian Sea, traverse the Two Armenias, enter the Arabian desert, all by means of past infinitives, when suddenly Picrochole discovers an obstacle to his progress:

Par ma foy, dist il, nous sommes affolez. Ha, pauvres gens.  
(Quoy? dirent ilz).

27 Ficino’s *discursio* is a post-classical variant of *discursus* which retains something of its earlier sense of a scattering or running about.

Que boyrons nous par ces desers. Car Julian Auguste et tout son oust y moururent de soif, comme l'on dict.

Nous (dirent ilz) avons jà donné ordre à tout. Par la mer Siriace vous avez neuf mille quatorze grands naufz chargées des meilleurs vins du monde, elles arriverent à Japhes. Là se sont trouvez vingt et deux cens mille chameaulx, et seize cens Elephans, lesquelz aurez prins à une chasse environ Sigeilmes, lors que entrastes en Lybie: et d'abondant eustes toute la Garavane de La Mecha. Ne vous fournirent ilz de vin à suffisance?

Voire mais, dist il, nous ne beumes point frais. 93–94

Here Picrochole announces a present misfortune, “nous sommes affolez,” a future dilemma, “Que boyrons nous par ces desers” and a past precedent, “Julian Auguste et tout son oust y moururent de soif.” To reassure him, his advisors respond with a series of past precautions expressed in the perfect, “nous avons jà donné ordre à tout,” or the preterite, “elles arriverent à Japhes,” along with a conjectural elephant hunt conducted in the future perfect. Picrochole then answers them with a begrudging preterite: “nous ne beumes point frais.” It seems fair to say that Picrochole and his colleagues have not fully mastered the principle of sequence of tenses. In particular, their use of the preterite seems incongruous in an ostensibly hypothetical or prospective narrative. It seems odd enough when the counselors claim to have “already taken care of” a future problem, but when they say that the hypothetical boats arrived, “elles arriverent,” the effect is clearly comical.

Such comical conjugations, while they might recall certain classical antecedents to Picrochole's council scene, also constitute a grammatical parody of prudence.<sup>28</sup> Prudence, as we have seen, signifies the capacity to anticipate the future on the basis of past experience, especially the vicarious experience that we gain from the study of history. The prudent man is never surprised, for his carefully rehearsed precautions enable him to confront the future as if it were in some sense already past. Rabelais, in keeping with his stylistic tendencies, literalizes the abstract notion of prudence by having his characters describe their future plans in the past tense as if they had already satisfied the thirst they will suffer on their expedition. The absurdity of this conceit subverts the authority of the past, represented here by the exemplary death of Julian the Apostate. No matter how carefully we meditate on the misfortunes of Emperor

28 Since Jean Plattard, *L'Oeuvre de Rabelais* (Paris, 1910) 207, it has been customary to evoke Plutarch's *Life of Pyrrhus* and Lucian's dialogue *Navigium seu vota* as the intertexts to Rabelais' text.



Julian or other historical figures, the past will not prepare us for the elusive contingencies of real historical time. For Rabelais, foresight is fictional.

The grammatical parody of Rabelais' council scene can be further assessed in the light of some of the syntactical theories proposed by French Renaissance grammarians. In particular, Louis Meigret's *Traité de la grammaire française* (1550) yields some interesting parallels with the unorthodox syntax of Picrochole's advisors.<sup>29</sup> To begin with, Meigret's chapter on verb tense and mood attests to a curiously prospective use of the perfect tense that has since vanished from French grammar: "Quelquefois aussi, pour montrer la chose future plus-que-présent, nous disons par le prétérit parfait 'j'ey fet maintenant, j'ey dit, j'ey tout incontinant diné': pour 'je ferey, direy, dinerey incontinant'" (72). Lest we think this usage peculiar to Meigret, we can cite Robert Estienne's *Traicté de la grammaire française* (1557), which appropriates Meigret's argument verbatim in the chapter on "les accidens du verbe." If Meigret had chosen, as some grammarians have done, to illustrate his points with literary quotations, he might have cited *Gargantua* to exemplify the prospective past tense: "nous avons jà donné ordre à tout." However, the citation would have revealed only too clearly the comical illogic of such usage.

Meigret's discussion of mood is also pertinent to our council scene. Like most of his contemporaries, Meigret recognizes five verbal moods: indicative, imperative, optative, subjunctive, and infinitive; but unlike his colleagues, he offers to theorize these distinctions to some degree.<sup>30</sup> The indicative mood he defines conventionally enough as the mood of fact: "celle qui dénote ce qui se fait, fera et a été fait" (72). The subjunctive or conjunctive mood, on the contrary, he calls the mood of doubt. "Non sans cause il est appelé douteux" (74), he maintains, since the subjunctive verb always depends on another verb or conjunction to complete its sense. In these terms, the passage quoted earlier, where Picrochole's advisors explain to him how his hypothetical thirst was satisfied in the midst of the desert, is a subjunctive phrase: "Là se sont trouvez vingt et deux cens mille chameaulx, et seize cens Elephans, lesquelz aurez prins à une chasse environ Sigeilmes, lors que entrastes en Lybie." For Meigret as for nearly all Renaissance grammarians, the future perfect of "aurez prins" is a tense of the subjunctive mood because it depends on another verb which,

29 Due to Meigret's inimitable and unsuccessful orthography, we will quote from the modernized edition of Franz Josef Haussmann (Tübingen, 1980).

30 For the sparse theory of moods in Renaissance grammar, see Louis Kukenheim, *Contributions à l'histoire de la grammaire italienne, espagnole et française à l'époque de la Renaissance* (Utrecht, 1974) 132–134, 166 and Sabine Lardon and Marie-Claire Thomine, *Grammaire du français de la Renaissance* (Paris, 2009) 223–226.



though usually conjugated in the future tense, appears here in the preterite or *passé simple*: “lors que entrastes.” The modal dubiousness of “aurez prins” in turn contaminates the preterite of “entrastes” especially since, for Meigret, the preterite itself is an indeterminate or dependent tense.

In discussing the past tenses of the French verb, Meigret compares the *passé simple* to the imperfect, both of which he classifies as “prétérits”: “Nous en avons un autre [prétérit] qui dénote l'action ou passion un peu plus parfaite: duquel toutefois le temps n'est pas bien déterminé: de sorte qu'il dépend de quelque autre: comme 'je vis le Roe lors q'il fut coroné.'” (69) Since it depends on another verb or conjunction, the *passé simple* is, in Meigret's own terms, a subjunctive tense although, unlike the future perfect, it does not appear in his paradigm of subjunctive tenses. Here we should remark that Meigret's notion of the temporal indeterminacy of the *passé simple* represents the consensus of Renaissance French grammarians: Palsgrave calls this tense “the indiffy-nyte tence,” for Jean Pillot it denotes an indeterminate past, Robert Estienne again copies Meigret, Antoine Cauchie and Jean Garnier both note that the preterite requires adverbial determination of time, and Henri Estienne offers an explanation for this indeterminacy when he points out that the *passé simple* describes actions in a more remote or distant past than does the *passé composé*.<sup>31</sup> Thus for Rabelais' contemporaries, the preterite is felt to convey a certain sense of contingency or doubt, wavering on the border between the indicative and the subjunctive, between fact and hypothesis.

In the context of Meigret's notions of tense and mood, Rabelais' verbal play leads to some troubling questions about the epistemological status of narrative propositions. If the prophetic preterite of Picrochole's advisors is patently incredible, what is to guarantee the more conventional uses of the preterite form from similar suspicion, especially the parenthetical preterite of “dire” which continues unobtrusively but insistently throughout the chapter? When the narrator repeats “(dirent-ilz)” and “(dist-il),” is he less impetuous than Picrochole? Is Picrochole's conversation any more factual than his conquests? Furthermore, what insures the reality of the explicitly historical “moururent,” which describes the death of Julian and his troops, especially when it is reported as hearsay, “comme l'on dict”? This phrase, “ils moururent

31 John Palsgrave, *L'Eclaircissement de la langue française*, ed. F. Génin (Paris, 1852) 382; Jean Pillot, *Gallicae linguae institutio* (1550; reprint Geneva, 1972) 20 v°; Robert Estienne, *Traicté de la grammaire François* (1557; reprint Geneva, 1972) 35; Antoine Cauchie, *Grammaire française* (1586), ed. Colette Demaizièrre (Paris, 2001) 116; Jean Garnier, *Institutio gallicae linguae* (1558; reprint Geneva, 1972) 47; Henri Estienne, *Hypomneses de gallica lingua*, ed. Jacques Chomarat (Paris, 1999) 232.

comme l'on dict" (93), is a brilliant example of interference between saying and doing, between history and hearsay. The close proximity of these verb forms relativizes their truth claims so that we can no longer be certain which preterite is securely past and which is premature or proleptic. The verb tenses here seem arbitrary and contingent; they exemplify the indeterminacy of narrative events, which Paul Valéry formulated as "le possible-à-chaque-instant."<sup>32</sup>

This pervasive contingency defies the ambitions of prudence. The conclusion to Rabelais' council scene introduces a new character, Echephron, whose name derives from "phronesis" or prudence. Echephron appears just as Picrochole is dividing up the spoils of his imaginary conquests, and his introduction interrupts the dialogue that has continued since the opening of the chapter. Thus the first act of Prudence is to suspend the progress of dialogue. His next act is to counsel Picrochole to stay at rest: "N'est ce mieulx que dés maintenant nous repousons, sans nous mettre en ces hazars?" (95). However, repose is precisely what the other characters cannot tolerate. Spadassin refutes the ethic of stasis with a proverb that evokes the appeal of adventure: "Qui ne se adventure, n'a cheval ny mule. Ce dist Salomon" (95). The verb "s'adventurer" suggests the romance theme of "aventure," the restless impulse to pursue a distant objective without interruption or delay. Spadassin's motto is especially appropriate for a narrator or one who pursues a verbal quest. Echephron answers with an inverse proverb: "Qui trop se adventure perd cheval et mulle. Respondit Malcon" (95). Together these two proverbs nullify each other, yielding a verbal stasis that represents the immobility of prudence.<sup>33</sup>

Picrochole resolves the dilemma with the impatient motto "passons oultre" (95), but at the same time he prudently anticipates a rearguard attack from the enemy. "Ce pendent que nous sommes en Mesopotamie, s'ilz nous donnoient sus la queue quel remede?" (95). Merdaille dispells such fear by reminding his sovereign that the Russians can muster a loyal army of 450,000 soldiers for him

32 In his "Fragments des mémoires d'un poème," first published in 1937, Valéry imagines a narrative that would acknowledge, at each turning point, the various outcomes possible before choosing among them. "Ce serait là substituer à l'illusion d'une détermination unique et imitative du réel, celle du *possible-à-chaque-instant*, qui me semble plus véritable." Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, vol. 1 (Paris, 1957) 1467.

33 On the subject of foresight and motion, Immanuel Kant, in his *Idea for a Universal History*, argued that "inference from past experience to expectations about the future [i.e. prudence] would at most lead to 'immobility' (*Tatlosigkeit*) and cripple all impulse toward action." Cited in Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA, 1985) 204. Rabelais seems to have anticipated Kant's arguments, without of course foreseeing them.

in a moment, “pour un moment.” Merdaille’s faith in an instantaneous call to arms, which strikes Picrochole as perfectly plausible, derives less from his bellicose impulse than from his narrative impulse, which seeks to traverse without delay the distance between word and deed. Of course, if the Russians don’t show up, Merdaille would be happy to take care of matters himself: “O si vous me y faictes vostre lieutenant je tueroys un pigne pour un mercier. Je mors, je rue, je frappe, je attrape, je tue, je renye” (95). This speech is an admirable specimen of imprudent eloquence. The breathless sequence of verbs uninterrupted by conjunctions, known as asyndeton, mimes the very movement and commotion that it describes. While Merdaille may violate every principle of morality and religion, his language exemplifies the sequential movement and temporal flow that are essential for narrative. Echephron, by contrast, speaks for stasis and distrusts adventure.

From this verbal contest, prudence may be said to emerge the loser. Whatever his moral or metaphysical beliefs may have been, Rabelais’ narrative instincts clearly warned him against an ethical principle that denied the natural role of time in language. This resistance to prudence is in turn related to the larger question of where the moral authority may reside in Rabelais’ fiction.<sup>34</sup> Who speaks for the author and who speaks against him? Does a character named after prudence speak with more authority than a character named after excrement? The answer is not in their names but in the style and syntax of their speech. In this regard, we ought to recognize the affinity between Echephron’s proverb, “qui trop se adventure, perd cheval et mulle,” and Grandgousier’s proverb, “qui trop embrasse peu estrainct.” Clearly, Grandgousier is one of the most sympathetic characters in Rabelais’ work, and one of those who best exemplifies the ideals of Christian humanism, and yet his language shares some of the bland stasis of Echephron’s speech. Both believe in the dubious logic of *festina lente*. Without pretending to resolve the problematic issue of moral authority in Rabelais’ fiction, we should acknowledge that for him, *festina lente* and other moral precepts do not have the force of dogma. Rather, they are quotations, unable to extricate themselves from the temporal flow of discourse. Their very circulation undermines their truth, which is a kind of monumental or static property. To reinvokethe metaphor of *paroles gelées*, a commonplace is neither coercive when thawed nor discursive when frozen.

34 For an excellent treatment of the “question morale” in Rabelais’ work and its relation to the question of meaning, see Michel Jeanneret, “Polyphonie de Rabelais: ambivalence, antithèse, et ambiguïté,” *Littérature* 55 (1984) 98–111.

### *Jeter le proverbe après la fable*

In the *De ratione studii*, when reviewing the resources available to the grammar master, in addition to *adagia*, *apophthegmata*, and *themata*, Erasmus lists the genre of the fable or *apologus*. Erasmus' adages often incorporate fables, and in fact Robert Estienne's mid-century Latin editions of Aesop routinely include a section entitled "fables taken from the adages of Erasmus for the common profit of children" thus recognizing the pedagogical value of the genre.<sup>35</sup> Here as elsewhere, humanism follows classical precedent: Quintilian recognized the affinity of proverb and fable in his *Institutio oratoria* (5.11.21), and Erasmus follows Quintilian in the *Prolegomena* to the *Adages* (ASD 11-1:51-52).<sup>36</sup> The *De ratione studii* gives the example of Aesop's fable of the two pouches or *πήραι*, one in front full of others' faults and one behind full of one's own (ASD 1-2:127). Erasmus himself performed the rhetorical exercise that he recommends to students by developing this fable in adage 590 *Non videmus manticae quod in tergo est*, which Rabelais in turn developed, according to the same pedagogical principle, in the *Tiers Livre*. As Rabelais' use of this Aesopic fable has been well documented by others,<sup>37</sup> we may turn our attention to a different fable, one that again reaches Rabelais through many intermediaries: the fable of the woodcutter and the god Mercury. This fable resurfaces in the prologue to the *Quart Livre* where it sponsors a reflection on the circulation of commonplaces in fictional narrative.

In Aesop's fable, of which there are three slightly variant versions with the same plot and *dénouement* but with different wording, an unnamed *ξύλευμένος* or woodcutter loses his ax by the river, and his lamentations provoke Hermes or Mercury to test his rustic honesty by offering him first a golden ax, then a silver ax, and finally his own ax, *τὸν οἰκεῖον*, which he ingenuously recognizes as his own, receiving the other two as well *en prime*. When he recounts his experience to his colleagues or *ἐταῖροις*, one of them wants to do the same thing, so he goes to the river, loses his ax, calls on the god, and when

35 *Aesopi Phrygis vita et fabulae* (Paris, 1545) Folger Library 263851. This edition includes 448 numbered fables, of which numbers 287 to 295 are identified as "Apologi ex chiliadibus adagiorum Erasmi desumpti ad communem puerorum fructum."

36 Modern scholarship has discerned in the fable and the proverb a common tendency to give concrete form to abstract concepts: see Helmut van Thiel, "Sprichwörter in Fabeln," *Antike und Abendland* 17 (1971) 105-118.

37 See Françoise Giordani, "Les tribulations d'une besace ou le parcours d'un apologue d'Esope dans le roman rabelaisien" in *Poétique et narration: mélanges offerts à Guy Demerson* (Paris, 1993) 393-405.

offered the golden ax, says, “sure enough, that’s mine.” Mercury, disgusted by the man’s ἀναιδεια or impudence, not only refuses him the golden ax but leaves him entirely axless, thus demonstrating the salutary moral that the god favors the just and disfavors the unjust.<sup>38</sup>

This fable inspired a proverb collected by the fifteenth-century Byzantine paroemiographer Apostolius under the title “The river doesn’t always bear axes” or Οὐκ ἀεὶ ποταμὸς ἄξινας φέρει.<sup>39</sup> Here, somewhat exceptionally for Apostolius’ curt style, the adage is accompanied by a story. A peasant or γεωργός going by the river loses his ax, and without the intervention of Mercury, the river offers him first a silver ax, then a golden ax, and finally his own, which he reclaims along with the other two as a bonus. In this abbreviated version there is no colleague, no contrast of honesty and dishonesty, and no explanation of why the river should not always bear axes.

When he compiled his *Chiliades*, Erasmus conflated Aesop with Apostolius to compose the adage *Fluvius non semper fert secures* (adage 3257). Here the familiar story, of which Erasmus recognizes two narrative variants, acquires an unfamiliar epilogue in which the lucky woodcutter consoles his unlucky colleague with the proverbial phrase, “rivers don’t always bear axes.” In this way, the fable becomes a setting for the adage, which initially was just a summary of the fable. For Erasmus, the adage is about the false assumption of precedent: it warns us that we cannot expect the same trick to work twice. “Non protinus tibi speres idem quod aliis feliciter cessit” (ASD II-7:164). This is a disconcerting lesson to derive from a proverb, for the whole point of paroemiology is to master the timeless truths of collective experience. One of western civilization’s leading paroemiophiles, Don Quijote, assures us that experience is the mother of all knowledge, and now after 3,257 tries, we learn that experience doesn’t work.<sup>40</sup> We can’t count on the continuity of human experience.

In effect, the *fluvius* of adage 3257 is a Heraclitan stream. If we can’t step in the same river twice, we are not likely to retrieve the same ax twice. Indeed

38 *Fabulae Aesopicae*, ed. Hausrath and Hunger, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Leipzig, 1959) 5. This fable is numbered 183 in the revised Teubner edition, 308 in the original Teubner edition by Karl Halm, and 253 in Émile Chambry’s bilingual Greek-French edition (Paris, 1927).

39 *Corpus paroemiographorum Graecorum*, ed. Leutsch and Schneidewin, vol. 2 (Göttingen, 1851) 593.

40 “Paréceme, Sancho, que no hay refrán que no sea verdadero, porque todos son sentencias sacadas de la misma experiencia, madre de las ciencias todas.” Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, ed. Juan Bautista Avallé-Arce, vol. 1 (Madrid, 1979) 248. The seventeenth-century lexicographer Gonzalo Correas collects the saying “La esperienza, madre es de la zienza” in his *Vocabulario de refranes y frases proverbiales*, ed Louis Combet (Bordeaux, 1967) 182.

the Heraclitan undercurrent of Erasmus' treatment of this familiar fable would seem to negate the ambition of the commonplace tradition, for which continuity and iteration are absolutely indispensable. Not only does Erasmus eschew the commonplace morality of virtue rewarded and vice punished, but he also seems to authorize some potently amoral speculation. Honesty may be the best policy for the first guy, but why should it work for anyone else? Or, if impudence fails by the riverside, why not try it somewhere else? This sophistic inflection of the fable seems to have limitless potential, which raises the question of the autonomy of the *locus communis*, or its capacity to mean whatever we want it to mean. At the same time, Erasmus' adage seems to foreclose its own future: a saying which disavows iteration ought not to be repeated. Yet, in the prologue to his *Quart Livre*, Rabelais found a way to give this saying an encore, with a completely unexpected result.

There are in fact two prologues to the *Quart Livre*, since Rabelais published a preliminary version of the novel in 1548 before completing the definitive version, with a new prologue, in 1552. It is the 1552 prologue that offers a burlesque version of Aesop's austere fable. In this prologue, a confluence of commonplaces drawn from such classical compilations as Plutarch's *Moralia*, Pliny's *Natural History*, and the *Onomasticon* of Julius Pollux, and filtered through Renaissance miscellanies like Erasmus' *Adages*, generate a vertiginous episode of imaginative fiction. Others have studied the prologue for its Menippean conflation of heterogeneous material, its hybrid amalgamation of commonplace wisdom and priapic humor.<sup>41</sup> I will focus instead on the paroemiographic character of Rabelais' fiction, which can be seen to emulate the methodology as well as the erudition of the *Adagiorum Chiliades*.

The episode of the extravagantly honest woodcutter and his fatally impudent neighbors has its own prologue, where the narrator, speaking in the voice of "M. François Rabelais docteur en Medicine," reminds us of the saying "Medecin, O, gueriz toy mesmes" (523) drawn from the Gospel of Saint Luke. In effect, the prologue of 1552 begins as a gloss on an ancient proverb, very much in the manner of an Erasmian adage and in the debt of Erasmian scholarship. To the Biblical saying, which in fact is a criticism that Christ anticipates of his own teaching rather than an obligation that he lays on his followers and even less on the medical profession,<sup>42</sup> Rabelais pairs a satiric saying from the Greek medical writer Galen, which he transcribes and translates as follows:

41 André Tournon, "Le paradoxe ménippéen dans l'oeuvre de Rabelais" in *Rabelais en son demi-millénaire* (Geneva, 1988) 309–317.

42 As Jerome Schwartz points out quite acutely in his commentary on the prologue in *Irony and Ideology in Rabelais: Structures of Subversion* (Cambridge, 1990) 162.

Cl. Gal. non pour telle reverence en santé soy maintenoit... mais par craincte de tomber en ceste vulgaire et Satyrique mocquerie. Ἰητρὸς ἄλλων αὐτὸς ἔλκεσι βρύων.

*Medicin est des aultres en effect:*

*Toutesfois est d'ulceres tout infect.* 523–24

This saying, which the *Suda* identifies as a verse of Euripides (fr. 1086), circulated quite widely among pagan and patristic writers in the following form: ἄλλων ἱατρὸς αὐτὸς ἔλκεσιν βρύων.<sup>43</sup> It is not clear why Rabelais prefers the ionic form *ietros* to the attic *iatros* or why he inverts the first two words of the quotation, but other compilers quote with similar imprecision, including Eustathius in his commentary on the *Iliad* 11.835.<sup>44</sup> One author who made good use of the Euripides fragment was Plutarch, and any pithy saying in Plutarch is unlikely to have escaped Erasmus' attention. Erasmus devoted two different adages to the idea of the doctor who cannot cure himself, *Aliorum medicus ipse hulceribus scates* 1438 and *Aliorum medicus* 3332, both of which derive from the Euripides fragment conserved in Plutarch's *Moralia*. Erasmus cites and translates the verse, identifies his source, and collects similar *loci* from the classical tradition including the passage from Luke. Rabelais does the same, combining citation, translation, and references, including the reference to Galen's *De tuenda sanitate* that somehow eluded Erasmus.

The topos of the ulcerous doctor leads us back through Plutarch to *parresia* and to the dangers and responsibilities of free speech, with which we began our study. One of the four different places where Plutarch quotes fragment 1086 of Euripides is at the end of his treatise *How to tell a flatterer from a friend*, where the moralist insists that *parresia* requires a great moral authority, and that the immoral man who speaks freely against others is like the proverbial doctor who cannot cure himself (*Moralia* 71F). Erasmus translates, "Caeterum ubi levis quispiam et improbis moribus homo dictis obiurgat et castigat, prius illud audire debet, *Mederis aliis ipsus ulceribus scatens*" (ASD IV-2:157). If Rabelais returns to this commonplace at the outset of the *Quart Livre*, it is perhaps not so much to affirm his credentials as a doctor exempt from disease,

43 See *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, vol. 5 *Euripides*, ed. Richard Kannicht (Göttingen, 2004) 1012 with extensive bibliography in the critical apparatus.

44 Eustathius misquotes the fragment as follows: ἄλλων ἱατρὸς αὐτὸς ἔλκε ἔχων, provoking the following comment from his modern editor: "Moneo Eust. (err. mem., ut videtur) locum haud accurate transmisisse." Eustathius, *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem*, ed. M. van der Valk, vol. 3 (Leiden, 1979) 337. Rabelais too was subject to *err. mem.* on occasion.



or ironically to acknowledge his frailty as Jerome Schwartz suggests (*Irony and Ideology* 162), but instead, or at the same time, to claim his right to speak freely against the Roman Catholic Church. At the threshold of his work, the author senses that he will soon go dancing around the well.

There is another connotation to this verse fragment that Erasmus helps us to recover from Plutarch's treatise *How to profit from one's enemies*, which Erasmus translated under the title *Quo pacto quis efficiat, ut ex inimicis capiat utilitatem* and which he cites at the head of adage 1438. For Plutarch, the profit we get from our enemies is criticism, which serves our self-knowledge, either when we criticize others and search our conscience for our own faults or when others criticize us and illuminate our blind spots. *Loidoria* or criticism, like *parresia*, requires a high moral standard of the critic, so before criticizing others, we ought to scrutinize our own character lest we invite that famous reproach ἄλλων ἱατρὸς αὐτὸς ἔλκεσιν βρύων (*Moralia* 88D). For Plutarch, this verse is an exhortation to self-knowledge and thus related to the Delphic injunction "know thyself" (*Moralia* 89A; Erasmus adage 595 *nosce teipsum*), which plays such a key role in Rabelais' *Tiers Livre* where Panurge ironically invokes "le premier traict de philosophie, qui est, CONGNOIS TOY" (428).<sup>45</sup> In his encounter with Her Trippa, Panurge seems to be a prime example of the *medicus aliorum*. The same can be said of Homenaz, the bishop who presides over the island of the Papimanes in the *Quart Livre*. As the chief idolater and convivial host of the Papimanes, Homenaz invokes this famous fragment of Delphic wisdom in the midst of a farcical ceremony devoted to the Holy Decretals: "En Delphes davant la face du temple de Apollo feut trouvée ceste sentence divinement escripte ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ" (652). Perhaps due to its transcription in Greek, *gnothi seauton* earns a place in the *Briefve declaration* (710). Nothing could hold a lower priority for Panurge or Homenaz than self-knowledge, yet they are pleased to quote this moral principle for its commonplace authority. The injunction to know thyself overlaps with the obligation to heal thyself, and both can be said to reveal their comic potential in Rabelais' novel. As he brandishes his commonplace wisdom before the audience, Rabelais' sententious narrator must be aware of the proximity between moral truths and comic quotations.

To conclude his prefatory gloss on the hackneyed saying "Doctor heal thyself," which Erasmus calls *illud vulgo tritissimum* (ASD II-3:430), and before ever reaching the long deferred fable of the woodcutter, Rabelais interweaves a few more commonplaces in his text, including one of his own invention. First he reinterprets the legal maxim "Le mort saisit le vif" in the medical sense

45 Edwin Duval reads these words as the centerpiece of the novel in "Panurge, Perplexity, and the Ironic Design of Rabelais's *Tiers Livre*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 35 (1982) 381–400.



that someone afflicted with disease, and thus figuratively dead, must seize on health, which is life. To enforce this identity of life and health, and thus to promote his own profession, the doctor appeals to a little known Greek poet from whom he appears to derive a venerable adage: “Santé est nostre vie, comme tresbien declare Ariphton Sicyonien. Sans santé n'est la vie vie, n'est la vie vivable, ABIOΣ BIOΣ, BIOΣ ABIΩΤΟΣ” (525). Strangely, the most reliable and most comprehensive Renaissance collections of commonplaces are unfamiliar with this catchy chiasmic proverb *abios bios, bios abiotos*. Many years ago, Charles Perrat proposed the most reasonable solution to this enigma in an article first published in *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* and excerpted in the notes to the last volume of the unfinished critical edition of Rabelais' work. At the outset of his prologue, Rabelais follows the treatise *De nobilitate* by the jurist André Tiraqueau, who collects many of the same commonplaces as Rabelais including the Euripides fragment as quoted by Plutarch. For Perrat, Rabelais matches Tiraqueau's legal chauvinism, which identifies life with wealth, with his own medical chauvinism identifying life with health. As for the Greek saying, Rabelais made it up from some hints he found in Tiraqueau. To this satisfying explanation, I would add that Tiraqueau is a keen student of Erasmus' adages, perhaps keener even than Rabelais' modern editors.

Very little is known of Ariphton the Sicyonian except for what Athenaeus tells us in the *Deipnosophistai*, where we learn that he composed a paean in praise of health. Erasmus relays this information in adage 2090 whose very long title can be rendered *First health, then beauty, then wealth*.<sup>46</sup> In other words, according to this adage of obvious interest to the medical profession, health is the greatest human good, greater than beauty or wealth. Adage 1735 proposes a different system of values, encapsulated in its compact title *Pecuniae vir*, according to which wealth is the greatest human good, without which life is lifeless or unlivable. More concisely, the indigent life is no life. The adage illustrates this sentiment with a short verse quotation (whose author Erasmus did not know but who is now identified as Menander): “Celebratur et hic senarius, non alienus ab hac sententia: βίος βίου δέόμενος οὐκ ἔστιν βίος, id est *Vita haud vocanda est vita victus indiga*” (ASD II-4:172). Tiraqueau must have read this commentary carefully, since he repeats it nearly verbatim in his *De nobilitate* as transcribed by Perrat: “βίος βίου δέόμενος οὐκ ἔστι βίος: Vita victu indigens, non

46 In Latin *Primum recte valere, proxima forma, tertio loco divitiae* (ASD II-5:93). Erasmus gives the reading “Aristo Sicyonius” even though Athenaeus 702A reads ὑπὸ Ἀρίφρονος τοῦ Σικυωνίου. Neither Tiraqueau nor Rabelais follow the reading Aristo.

recte vita dicitur.”<sup>47</sup> These lines of Tiraqueau in turn moved Rabelais to recoin the saying in even more cogent form, *abios bios, bios abiotos*, where the use of oxymoron may emulate *festina lente*. To recapitulate, the process of transmission goes from the Aldine edition of Theocritus in 1495, which includes Menander’s *Monosticha* in an appendix of anonymous *Sententiae monostichi*, to Erasmus’ adages, to Tiraqueau’s legal treatise, to Rabelais’ new coinage in the 1552 prologue. This is one commonplace that improves with circulation. We may also point out that the tension between Erasmus’ two adages, one on health and the other on wealth, parallels the professional dispute between medicine and law that Rabelais stages in his prologue.

Having established that health is a very wise and moderate ambition for himself and his readers, Rabelais invokes the topos of *mediocritas aurea*: “Mediocrité a esté par les saiges anciens dicte aurée” (525). This is the moral under whose auspices the text enrolls its new, vernacular version of Aesop’s fable. This moral was given proverbial form by Erasmus in the adage *Ne quid nimis* or “nothing to excess.” Erasmus ironically invokes this principle at the outset of his prefatory epistle to the 1533 edition of the Adages, where he declares that if, according to the old proverb, we should observe moderation in all things, then the same is true of collecting proverbs.<sup>48</sup> This may seem like a belated discovery to make in the significantly enlarged eighth edition of a work that had already reached immoderate dimensions long before.<sup>49</sup> Included in what Ari Wesseling called Erasmus’ “massive supplement” (ASD II-8:14) of 488 new adages to the 1533 edition is adage 3704 *Nihil potest nec addi nec adimi* (“Nothing can be added or subtracted”), which nicely contradicts itself when added to the Adages. This saying is supposed to evoke the state of perfection attained through *mediocritas*, or the exemption from either lack or excess, in accordance with Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>50</sup> From this addition, we may infer that the Adages were imperfect. Of course, neither the *Adagia* nor the

47 *Oeuvres de François Rabelais*, tome sixième, *Le Quart Livre*, chapitres I–XVII, ed. Delaunay, Huon, Marichal, Perrat, Saulnier (Geneva, 1955) 27.

48 “Si iuxta vetus proverbium omni in re modus est optimus, par erat et in colligendis proverbiiis adhibere modum” (ASD II-1:39) from epistle 2773 addressed “philologis omnibus”.

49 The ASD labels this edition H. The separate, authorized editions of the Adages in Erasmus’ lifetime are 1508, 1515, 1517, 1520, 1523, 1526, 1528, 1533, and 1536 lettered A to I in the critical edition. All but the first were published in Basel by Froben or his heirs.

50 “De perfectis operibus ita vulgo dici solitum indicat Aristoteles libro Moralium Nicomachiorum secundo: “Ὅθεν εἰώθασιν ἐπιλέγειν τοῖς εὖ ἔχουσιν ἔργοις, ὅτι οὐκ ἀφελεῖν ἔστιν οὔτε προσθεῖναι, id est Unde de operibus quae bene habent ita solent praedicare: Nec adimere possis nec addere. Nam ut bene sit aliquid praestat mediocritas, tollit excessus aut defectus” ASD II-8:130. Erasmus cites from *NE* 1106b9–11.

*Quart Livre* aspire to the ranks of the *perfecta opera*. Rabelais' ostentatious amplification of Aesop's fable is another deliberate infringement of the golden mean in the spirit of Erasmus' proliferating proverbs.<sup>51</sup>

Rabelais' adaptation of an habitually concise and schematic tale introduces some striking innovations including the prolix protagonist, Couillatris, who is no longer content to answer yes or no or to cite one meager proverb in conclusion. Another novelty is the council scene in heaven where Jupiter consults his colleagues on certain urgent matters of state until Couillatris interrupts them with his equally urgent lamentations. The main innovation of this Lucianic interlude is the digressive role of the god Priapus, who defers the resolution of the fable with a very circumstantial account of the quarrel between Pierre de la Ramée and Pierre Galand and with a very long equivocation on the word "cognée". When Mercury finally descends to earth to administer the test of the three axes, gold, silver, and wood, Couillatris wins unprecedented wealth while his neighbors experience a rather precipitous decline in health since they are all decapitated. This edifying massacre is supposed to enforce the lesson of mediocrity though in truth it seems better suited to ratify the adage *Pecuniae vir* in a cruelly literal way, since to lose one's means of subsistence, in this instance one's ax, is to lose one's life. In this way the prologue destabilizes the didactic function of commonplaces while cultivating their poetic function and especially their potential for expansion. The moderation exhibited by the prologue is allied with the notion of *gratuité* from the episode of Alpharbal in chapter 50 of *Gargantua*, where one act of generosity begets another in an infinite expansion (133–134). Gratitude never stops, and neither does moderation. In Rabelais' prologue, the very sober admonition to practise moderation leads to verbal profligacy. The apology of mediocrity enlists all the resources of copia, including narrative digression and verbal proliferation, with its affection for lists, in order to make an immoderate praise of moderation. The prologue, in other words, is an instance of paradoxical encomium, and as such, it belongs to a venerable tradition both in Renaissance letters and in the Rabelaisian corpus itself, well known and admired for its epideictic exercises.<sup>52</sup>

51 For a comprehensive approach to the question of the golden mean in Renaissance humanism and in Rabelais, see Tristan Vigliano, *Humanisme et juste milieu au siècle de Rabelais: essai de critique illusoire* (Paris, 2009). Vigliano understands Rabelais' work as a quest, albeit illusory, for the golden mean, and he sees in the prologue to the *Quart Livre* a genuine commitment to the ethical ideal of moderation.

52 For a survey of the paradoxical encomium from antiquity to the ancien régime, see Patrick Dandrey, *L'éloge paradoxal de Gorgias à Molière* (Paris, 1997). For the paradoxical encomium in the Renaissance and in Rabelais, see François Rigolot, *Les langages de Rabelais*,

The key to paradoxical encomium is disproportion. This can be an ethical disproportion between the rhetoric of praise and the object of praise, as in the praise of debt or the praise of plague. Yet moderation is not in itself unpraiseworthy and certainly not trivial or infamous like the *infames materiae* of Aulus Gellius' chapter on paradoxical encomium (*Noctes Atticae* 17.12). The proportion may be simply one of scope: a big praise of a small topic. In this regard, the paradoxical encomiast is like the cobbler who knows how to make big shoes for small feet, as Agesilaus used to say.<sup>53</sup> Or the disproportion may be intertextual: a long retelling of a short story, or a long relocation of a brief *locus*. The 1552 prologue to the *Quart Livre* exemplifies this latter category in the same way as does Erasmus' adage 2601, adapted from Aesop's fable of the Eagle and the Beetle.

In *Scarabeus aquilam quaerit*, Erasmus converts a fable that occupies 21 lines of Greek in the Teubner edition to a proverb that covers more than 800 lines of Latin in the Amsterdam critical edition of his complete works. He does so, moreover, just to show the he can do it or *ostentationis causa*, as Cicero remarked unadmirably of the sophists in his *Academica*.<sup>54</sup> The main expansionary technique of adage 2601 is elocutionary: the commentator cannot refrain from speaking in adages, that is to say, from citing himself. The text is studded with gems from the *Chiliades* in such profusion that there is no discernable boundary between proverb and commentary. Since the resources of the commonplace tradition are inexhaustible, there is no reason for the commentary to stop until it is interrupted by the indignation of the imaginary reader, whom Erasmus addresses as follows:

But I know well enough, dear reader, that you have been thinking for some time, 'What is this fellow thinking of, chattering on to us with so much nonsense about nothing and making, not exactly an elephant out of a fly as they say, but a giant out of a beetle?'<sup>55</sup> CWE 35:213

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ch. 5: "Langage du topiqueur." A fine introduction to this genre of epideictic rhetoric is Arthur Stanley Pease, "Things Without Honor," *Classical Philology* 21 (1926) 27–42.

53 "Ego ne sutorem quidem arbitrer bonum, qui parvo pedi magnos inducat calceos," according to Erasmus' *Apophthegmata* (ASD IV-4:52) from Plutarch's *Moralia* 208C. The anecdote returns in adage 2567 *Herculis cothurnos aptare infanti* and in Montaigne's essay "De la vanité des paroles" (I,51).

54 "Sophistae . . . sic enim appellabantur ei qui ostentationis aut quaestus causa philosophabantur" *Academica* 2.72.

55 "Sed iamdudum, sat scio, sic tecum cogitas, optime lector: 'Quid isti venit in mentem, ut tantum nugurum de nihilo nobis effutiat ac non quidem elephantum e musca, quod aiunt, sed e scarabeo gigantem reddat?'" ASD II-6:423.

Here Erasmus credits his reader with forging a new proverb, “to make a giant out of a beetle,” from the old proverb, to make an elephant out of a fly, to designate his inflation of an austere brief model. Erasmus insists that if he has performed this verbal ruse, it is only to show that when he is brief elsewhere, it is by choice rather than necessity:

I wanted to show these people certainly that I have chosen to be brief in the rest of the book; otherwise I would not have been short of matter to enrich it if I had thought more of showing off my eloquence [*copia*] than of giving pleasure to the reader.<sup>56</sup> CWE 35:213–214

Erasmus makes *copia* from brevity by enlisting the resources of the commonplace tradition, and Rabelais imports this strategy into the vernacular. He has made, if not a giant out of a beetle, then at least a prolix prologue from a reticent fable. This exercise in epideictic rhetoric reveals two important tendencies of commonplace speech: brevity engenders loquacity, and circularity has no endpoint. These are two *aporiai* or dilemmas that will preoccupy the inventor of the essay form, Michel de Montaigne.

### The Traveling Chameleon

Frozen words are not the only allegory of the *Quart Livre* that exemplifies the process which we are studying. The first landfall in the voyage of the *Quart Livre* is the island of Medamothi, where the Pantagruelistes provide some stimulus to the local economy by going shopping for exotic souvenirs, including some improbable paintings that are taken to illustrate the esthetic preoccupations of the novel.<sup>57</sup> Among their purchases, the travelers acquire an unusual animal known as a Tarande, which seems to be the utopian equivalent of the chameleon for its ability to blend into its environment. This ability, according to the salesman, who comes from the land of the Gelones, naturally renders the Tarande a rare commodity:

56 “Istis nimirum libuit ostendere me in caeteris data opera breviorē esse; alioqui non defuturum fuisse, quo rem locupletarem, si ostentandae copiae quam iuvando lectori studere maluissem” ASD II-6:424.

57 For the esthetic implications of the episode, see Antoinette Huon, “Alexandrie et l’alexandrinisme dans le *Quart Livre*: L’escale à Medamothi,” *Études Rabelaisiennes* 1 (1956) 98–111; Paul J. Smith, *Voyage et écriture* (Geneva, 1987) 165–78; and Eric MacPhail, “The Masters of Medamothi: Rabelais and Visual Prose,” *Études Rabelaisiennes* 35 (1998) 175–91.

Et disoit le Gelon peu en estre trouvé parmi la Scythie: par ce qu'il change de couleur selon la varieté des lieux es quelz il paist et demoure. Et represente la couleur des herbes, arbres, arbrisseaux, fleurs, lieux, pastiz, rochiers, generalmente de toutes choses qu'il approche. 541–42

The Tarande shares this remarkable property with a few other creatures: “Cela luy est commun avecques le Poulpe marin, c'est le Polype: avecques les Thoes: avecques les Lycaons de Indie: avecques le Chameleon” (542). Not only can the Tarande match its natural environment; it can also blend into the human environment by mimicking the colors of the garments worn by people around it:

Prés de Panurge vestu de sa toge bure, le poil luy devenoit gris: prés de Pantagruel vestu de sa mante d'escarlade, le poil et peau luy rougissoit: prés du pilot vestu à la mode des Isiaces de Anubis en Aegypte, son poil apparut tout blanc. Les quelles deux dernieres couleurs sont au Chameleon deniées. 542

This last detail, concerning the chromatic limitations of the chameleon, derives, as the commentators duly inform us, from Pliny's *Natural History* (8.122), but the moral significance was revealed by Erasmus.

Marie-Madeleine Fontaine has surveyed with admirable thoroughness the classical and modern sources for the Tarande, and she shows moreover how Rabelais exploits the novelistic or narrative potential of this commonplace learning.<sup>58</sup> To her bibliography, I would add another modern synthesis of classical compilations of zoological curiosities, namely the *Adagiorum Chiliades* of Erasmus. In particular, I would suggest that Rabelais has been reading adage 94 *Polypi mentem obtine* in order to endow his episode with a paradigmatic significance. For Erasmus, the saying “think like a polyp” admonishes us to adapt to every style of life and, like Proteus, to change our form as the circumstances dictate: “Qui nos admonet, uti nos ad omnem vitae rationem accommodemus ac Proteum quendam agentes, prout res postulabit, in quamlibet formam transfiguremus” (ASD II-1:200). Different places have different *mores*, and we cannot blindly maintain our own customs and habits wherever we go. No one should think that his adage teaches base flattery, and the example of Alcibiades' preternatural flexibility, from Plutarch's treatise *How to tell a flatterer from a friend*, is frankly troubling. However, there is a kind of inflexible and inopportune consistency that we should eschew in favor of a

58 Marie-Madeleine Fontaine, “Une narration biscornue: le Tarande du *Quart Livre*” in *Poétique et narration* 407–427.

more accommodating behavior, modeled on Ulysses, Brutus, David, and even St. Paul, who made himself all things to all people in order to serve the cause of Christ (ASD II-1:201). The reference to St. Paul alludes to a passage from the first Epistle to the Corinthians, where Paul proclaims that he has made himself like a Jew to the Jews, like one under the law to those under the law, like one not under the law to those not under the law, and finally, “Omnibus factus sum omnia, ut omnino aliquos servem,” in Erasmus’ version of the New Testament (ASD VI-3:262 from I Corinthians 9.22). In the *Ratio verae theologiae*, which served as an introduction to his second edition of the New Testament, Erasmus likens St. Paul to a chameleon for his capacity to ingratiate himself with any audience in order to promote the Christian faith.<sup>59</sup> The same text also compares Christ to Proteus. Thus, the polyp and related figures have an encomiastic value, and they embody some spiritual and practical virtue that the adage exhorts us to emulate. However, nothing prevents us from using the same adage pejoratively in order to satirize the kind of unprincipled versatility targeted by the comic poets Plautus and Eupolis (ASD II-1:201–202). The chameleon can have the same connotations as the polyp, and Plutarch uses the chameleon as a figure of the flatterer, because it can imitate any color but candor: “quemvis imitari colorem praeterquam candidum” (ASD II-1:202). A few more natural historical facts round off the adage, which receives a fuller exposition than most adages from the first century of the *Chiliades*.

What Erasmus teaches, better than other compilers, is that the adage itself is a chameleon. You can use it either to encourage versatility or to discourage versatility depending on the context. The commonplace takes on the color of its surroundings like the fabulous Tarande or the more common flatterer. Commonplaces circulate fluently because of their infinite adaptability. Their equivocation guarantees their currency. Erasmus’ diction emphasizes this ambivalence when he says “quamquam nihil vetat” (ASD II-1:201) or “even though nothing prevents us” from taking the saying differently. This concessive construction, which allows the argument to pivot unexpectedly, anticipates Montaigne’s use of adverbs such as “toutesfois” “pourtant” or “au rebours” whereby he draws attention to the reversible nature of his arguments.

The topos of the chameleon or Tarande is particularly well adapted to a novel whose author introduces himself as a doctor who knows how to adapt to his patients. The dedicatory epistle, which is addressed to Odet de Coligny

59 “Quanta vafritie Paulus ubique chamaeleonta quempiam, ut ita loquar, agit et in omnia vertitur, ut undique lucri nonnihil addat Christo.” Erasmus, *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Hajo Holborn (Munich, 1933) 223. See Peter Bietenholz, *History and Biography in the Work of Erasmus* (Geneva, 1966) 86.



and signed “Franc. Rabelais medicin” (521), defines the practice of medicine as a farce with three characters: the patient, the doctor, and the illness. This comparison, taken from Hippocrates, reminds Rabelais of the conversation between Emperor Augustus and his daughter Julia, who offends her father one day with her immodest appearance and appeases him the next with a more modest *tenue*. To account for the change, she says that she was dressed for her husband the previous day and now she is dressed for her father. Similarly, the doctor must dress for his patient:

Semblablement pourroit le medicin ainsi desguisé en face et habitz, mesmement revestu de riche et plaisante robbe à quatre manches . . . respondre à ceulx qui trouveroient la prosopopée estrange. ‘Ainsi me suis je acoustré, non pour me guorgiaser et pomper: mais pour le gré du malade, lequel je visite’. 518

In effect, the doctor must adapt his appearance to his surroundings, just as the polyp teaches us to assume whatever appearance is appropriate for the occasion: “pro tempore . . . alium atque alium vultum sumere” (ASD II-1:198). Moreover, the witty saying of the emperor’s daughter, reported by Macrobius and collected by Erasmus in the *Apophthegmata* (ASD IV-4:327), has had to adapt to the new environment of Rabelais’ therapeutic novel. In its new context, this quotation carries a meaning unanticipated in previous contexts. Whether fable, proverb, or apophthegm, the commonplace must mimic the chameleon when it moves from reference works and compendia to works of imaginative fiction.

In these few episodes examined here from Rabelais’ work, we can appreciate the remarkable mobility and fluidity of Renaissance commonplaces in humanist fiction. Authors prize these sayings for their capacity to freeze and thaw, to expand and proliferate, and to adapt to ever new surroundings. However, these same properties deprive the commonplace of any stable moral authority. The same saying can be used to argue on both sides of the question, and the best *topiqueur* has the fewest scruples. Consequently, we can hardly rely on these *loci communes* in order to identify the moral of the story. Instead, we can observe how they come to life in fictional episodes and become the actors of the plot. Through a mastery of the classical canon and a keen attention to Erasmus’ adages, Rabelais was able to create a very strange adventure out of the familiar resources of humanist education.



## Rhapsody in Prose

Walter Ong entitled his justly celebrated and richly suggestive study of the commonplace tradition in Renaissance Europe “Commonplace Rhapsody.”<sup>1</sup> In this article, he draws attention to the self-designation of Theodor Zwinger’s massive compilation *Theatrum humanae vitae* (Basel, 1565) as a rhapsody and elicits the etymological significance of rhapsody as an act of sewing or weaving together disparate strands. He even suggests that the French humanist Jean Tixier, better known as Ravisius Textor, followed his onomastic destiny by weaving together his commonplace book, the *Officina*. Following Ong’s lead, this chapter will pursue the inquiry into metaphors of sewing and unraveling in humanist prose with particular attention to how Montaigne reflects on his own labor as he stitches and unstitches his essays.

While Ong proposes to derive “rhapsody” from the Greek *rhapsodein* (Ong 112) or to do what a rhapsode does, it might be simpler to refer to the verb *ῥάπτω*, *ῥάπτειν* whose primary meaning is to sew or stitch together. The product of this action is a patchwork, a compilation, such as an epic poem in oral culture or a humanist miscellany in early print culture. To judge by classical usage, the verb *ῥάπτω* has a semantic range comparable to *ὑφαίνω*, which means to weave, to plot, or even to compose a text. The product of such activity is a *ὑφασμα* or web just as *ῥάπτω* yields rhapsody. Humanist prose is a web of commonplaces, and the humanist labors as a *textor*, a rhapsode, a *raccommodeur*, and even in some cases a new Penelope, ceaselessly unweaving and reweaving her web to defer closure and maintain suspense.

In humanist Latin, the noun *rhapsodus* is rare and appears to be pejorative in the majority of cases. The *rhapsodus* is the author of a *rhapsodia* or *rapsodia*, which often designates some sort of compendium or collection of historical examples. At the end of the fifteenth century, the Venetian humanist Marco Antonio Sabellico published a work of universal history divided into Enneads or groups of seven books under the title *Enneades ab orbe condito ad inclinatio-nem Romani imperii* (Venice, 1498). While this first version concludes with the fall of the Roman empire, the author kept expanding his work until his death

1 Ong, Walter J. “Commonplace Rhapsody: Ravisius Textor, Zwinger and Shakespeare” in *Classical Influences on European Culture A.D. 1500–1700*, ed. R.R. Bolgar (Cambridge, 1976) 91–126. More recently, Jean-Marc Chatelain has studied “Encyclopédisme et forme rhapsodique au XVI siècle,” *Littérales* 21 (1997) 97–111.

in 1506, and the first posthumous edition bore the title *Rapsodie historiarum Enneadum ab orbe condito ad annum salutis humane 1504* (Paris: Josse Bade, 1509). Subsequent editions appeared throughout the course of the sixteenth century, entitled *Rapsodiae historiarum* or *Rapsodiae historicae*, with supplements from various continuators including Caspar Hedio and Celio Secondo Curione; and the work continued to be read in the seventeenth century, by Robert Burton for one, who used it to compile his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which refers to itself at one point as a rhapsody. The 1560 Basel edition of Sabellico's complete works prepared by Celio Curione inserts before the sixth of eleven total Enneads an *Epistola Apologetica* addressed *ad Democritum suum* purporting to explain the title *Rapsodia*. In this letter, also collected in book seven of the author's *Familiar Letters*, Sabellico explains that rhapsody used to mean to sing what is now spoken, if Strabo is to be believed, for history is cognate to poetry or even, according to Quintilian, a poem in prose.<sup>2</sup> Thus the title conveys the poetic quality of the work rather than its composite or patchwork appearance.

Still, the title *Rhapsodies of histories* implies a selection of historical examples stitched together from a wide range of sources, and the Renaissance seems to have recognized the rhapsody as a distinct genre of history writing. Theodor Zwinger offers a detailed typology of the genre in the preface to his own *Theater of Human Life*, where he discusses his work according to its four causes: material, formal, efficient, and final.<sup>3</sup> The efficient cause includes both historians, who recount the deeds of others, and rhapsodes, who collect examples from historians. Philosophy can be divided into genesis and analysis, he tells us, which correspond more or less to the categories of theory and practice. Zwinger is interested in practical, analytical rhapsody. Writers of examples can be divided both in respect to matter and in respect to form: in the first respect, some write particular rhapsodies while others write universal rhapsodies, and in respect to form, some compile a formless mass of examples (*exemplorum farraginem ἄτακτον*) while others organize their examples under commonplace headings (*in certos titulos*). For Zwinger, order is the soul of the work, and he even blames Erasmus for following an accidental order in the *Apophthegms*,

2 "Vale et si quis de Rapsodiae voce nobis litem intenderit . . . meminisse poterunt illi fuisse canere apud maiores quod nunc eloqui est, si Strabo verus est autor . . . est enim poeticae cognata historia, ac quodammodo solutum carmen, ut scribit Fabius." Marc Antonio Sabellico, *Opera omnia*, ed. Celio Curione, tome 2 (Basel, 1560). Quintilian defines history as a kind of prose poem in *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.31.

3 "Praefatio ad nobiles fratres Ioannem, Christophorum et Esaïam Weitmoseros" in *Theatrum humanae vitae* (Basel, 1565) 3–31. Our summary is based on pages 12 to 17.

which are listed by speaker rather than *iuxta locos*. Zwinger's own ambition in compiling his Theater has been to outdo all rhapsodes both in abundance and organization: "ut omnes exemplorum rhapsodos et copia et dispositione superemus." He has no use for particular rhapsodies, while the universal rhapsodies had to be cut short (*castrandae fuerunt*). He has chosen only the best from his sources: "non omnia sed potissima tantum selegimus." This method is to be taken as a gauge of his own moderation and temperance, so that the author himself becomes an example of these commonplace headings. As for the genesis of the work, Conrad Lycosthenes collected examples for more than fifteen years but could not decide what to do with them, and on his death he left his son-in-law an unformed mass of material: "revera enim rudis erat, indigestaque moles." Here again we have a reminiscence of Ovidian chaos, but without the esthetic endorsement offered by Joachim Fortius Ringelberg in his *Chaos* of 1529. Zwinger took over after Lycosthenes and put the raw matter into shape. In his own words, lest he be thought a mere rhapsode, he reduced this chaos into philosophical order.<sup>4</sup> Here Zwinger recognizes the pejorative connotation of rhapsody, its proximity to irrational matter, and he attempts to compensate for this defect by emphasizing the rational, philosophical organization of his work. The very thoroughness of his discussion betrays his anxiety over the dangers inherent in the genre of the rhapsody.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the use of *rhapsodus* for classificatory purposes, Renaissance humanists included the term in their polemical vocabulary. Erasmus offers an example of the polemical use of the term in his *Dialogus Ciceronianus* (1529) where he condemns the Ciceronians who use pagan words to develop a Christian argument. Speaking of Jacopo Sannazaro's neo-Latin Christian epic, *De partu Virginis*, Bulephorus doubts that such poetry can be pious if it never takes its eyes off Virgil, Horace, and Ovid, unless we approve the effort of those who describe the life of Christ in a *cento*, made up of verses from Homer or Virgil: "fragmentis Homericorum aut Virgilianorum versuum in centonem consarcinatis" (ASD 1-2:701). *Consarcinatis* is a participial form of *consarcinare*, which is the closest Latin equivalent to ῥάπτειν. Itself a rare post-classical or post-Augustan usage, *consarcino* means to sew or patch together,

4 "et ne merus rhapsodus esse viderer, Philosophiae ductu in eum ordinem exemplorum confusam prius et indigestam farraginem contraxi, qui perpetuus esset, neque (nisi me mea fallit imago) a quoquam temere immutari potest" (17).

5 For an interesting discussion of Zwinger's influence on Montaigne, see Fausta Garavini, "Montaigne et le *Theatrum vitae humanae*" in *Montaigne et l'Europe*, ed. Claude-Gilbert Dubois (Bordeaux, 1992) 31-45.

and Gellius uses it to describe how Roman poets compose Latin comedies pieced together from superior Greek models (*Noctes Atticae* 2.23.21). In the *Ciceronianus*, Bulephorus compares the verse genre of the *cento*, patched together from classical fragments, to the Ciceronian mania of applying a strict Ciceronian usage to Christian topics: “Atqui non ita multum dissimilis est istorum conatus qui verbis, sententiolis, figuris ac numeris ex Cicerone congestis, convestiunt argumentum Christianum” (ASD I-2:701). Such prose writers use Cicero’s words and stylistic devices to dress up or disguise (*convestire*) a Christian theme. It is this incongruity between pagan eloquence and Christian piety that offends Bulephorus, who asks skeptically: “quid enim laudis fert ille rhapsodus?” (ASD I-2:701). Who praises the rhapsode? Not Bulephorus, who asks his interlocutor and patient Nosoponus what he would think if someone disassembled a mosaic depicting the rape of Ganymede and used the pieces or *tessellae* to make a new mosaic of the Angel Gabriel and the Annunciation (ASD I-2: 702). It is interesting that the *Ciceronianus* equates rhapsody, *cento*, and mosaic as forms that reuse the constituent elements of tradition.<sup>6</sup> Here Erasmus considers this reuse to be an abuse, but elsewhere he uses these metaphors to different effect.

Erasmus translated eleven of the treatises in Plutarch’s *Moralia* from Greek into Latin, and one of the last to be published, the *De cohibenda ira* (1525), is dedicated to the Hungarian nobleman Alexius Thurzo. In his dedicatory epistle, Erasmus tries to convince his correspondent of the difficulty of translating Plutarch, which derives as much from the subtlety of the author’s style as from the variety of his erudition. To the author’s credit and the translator’s chagrin, Plutarch’s text resembles a *cento* or, better yet, a mosaic: “ut non orationem sed Centonem aut, ut melius dicam, musaicum opus existimes” (ASD IV-2:264). What Erasmus finds particularly challenging is the difficulty of identifying Plutarch’s sources, many of which are no longer extant:

All this was easy enough for him since his mind was stored with literary works of every kind, but it is very difficult for the translator to discover what he borrowed and from what source, especially as we no longer

6 For the genre of the *cento* and its association with rhapsody, see George Hugo Tucker, “The Witty Art of the Neo-Latin *Centio*” in *Court and Humour in the French Renaissance* (Bern, 2009) 147–164. Montaigne criticism has assimilated rhapsody and mosaic, not in relation to the *Essays* but rather to Montaigne’s travel journal. See Élisabeth Schneikert, “Le *Journal de Voyage* au fil du *BSAM*: ‘Rhapsodie’ et ‘marqueterie,’” *Bulletin de la Société Internationale des Amis de Montaigne* 56 (2012) 99–109.

possess many of the authors from whose meadows he picked the blooms for the weaving of his garlands.<sup>7</sup> CWE 11:104

Now Plutarch's borrowings from literary tradition are no longer described as *emblemata* or pieces of a mosaic but rather as flowers gathered from the meadow (*e pratis flosculos*) and woven into garlands (*corollas*). By highlighting the difficulty of source recognition, which might not be thought to be the business of the translator, Erasmus indulges in his own game of intertextuality. For we encounter a similar difficulty if we try to identify the source of his ubiquitous floral image, which could come from any number of intermediary texts notorious to Erasmus and his contemporaries. One very prominent model from late antiquity is the epilogue to Aelian's swollen miscellany *De natura animalium*, where the author invokes the esthetic of variety to justify his neglect of order, saying that he has woven his text like a meadow or a garland made from many colors:

Like a meadow or a seasonable garland of many colors, flowering as it were with a multitude of animals, I saw fit to weave and to plait my text.<sup>8</sup>

Erasmus' verb *contextuit* in the phrase "unde corollas hasce contextuit" corresponds to Aelian's ὑφαίνειν from ὑφαίνω, whose affinity to ῥάπτω I doggedly maintain. In light of this intertextual coincidence between Aelian's poetics and the poetics that Erasmus ascribes to Plutarch, we may infer that both compilers, both Aelian and Plutarch perform the same kind of labor, the labor of the rhapsode. Now, to answer Bulephorus' question from the *Ciceronianus*, "multum enim laudis fert ille rhapsodus."

If Erasmus is intolerant of the *consarcinator* in his *Ciceronianus*, he is more indulgent elsewhere. In his commentary on Ovid's *Nux* (ASD 1-1:157), he calls Niccolò Perotti a *consarcinator* for his role in assembling the vast lexicographic encyclopedia known as *Cornu copiae seu linguae Latinae commentarii*

7 "Quod ut illi fuit facillimum, qui pectus habebat instructissimum omni genere literariae suppellectilis, ita difficillimum est interpreti, quid unde decerpserit, observare, praesertim quum plerique scriptores non extent, e quorum pratis decerpserit suos flosculos, unde corollas hasce contextuit" ASD IV-2:264.

8 Claudius Aelianus, *De natura animalium* Bibliotheca Teubneriana (Berlin, 2009) 431: οἷον εἰ λειμώνά τινα ἢ στέφανον ὥραϊον ἐκ τῆς πολυχροίας, ὡς ἀνθροσφόρων τῶν ζώων τῶν πολλῶν, ᾧ ἤθην δεῖν τήνδε ὑφαίνειν τε καὶ διαπλέξαι τήν συγγραφήν. The humanist translator Pierre Gilles renders this passage, omitting one of the clauses in Greek, thus: "velut pratum aut coronam pulchram ex multis coloribus existimavi oportere texere historiam."

to which his own adages are much indebted. More importantly, in the adages he calls his own work a *consarcinatio*. The adage *Herculei labores* dramatizes the thankless task of the paroemiographer and deflects criticism of Erasmus' book including accusations of ineloquence. Rhetorical ornament, he argues rhetorically, has no place "in tam varia rerum consarcinatione" (ASD II-5:34) or in such a vast patchwork. This whole passage, where Erasmus forswears eloquence, seems to be a discreet attempt at paradoxical encomium somewhat reminiscent of Pico's letter to Barbaro in defense of the ineloquent scholastics. Even if he ever acquired eloquence, Erasmus claims, he must have lost it in his lengthy, varied, and random study of ancient authors: "in tam diutina, tam varia, tam tumultuaria Graecorum et Latinorum autorum evolutione" (ASD II-5:35). What Erasmus calls "tumultuaria autorum evolutio" and what I have translated as random study of authors, far from being a defect, appeals to the humanist esthetic of *tumultuarius sermo* quite pervasive in late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century humanist philology.<sup>9</sup> *Tumultuarius* means hasty, unpremeditated, disordered and thus inspired, spontaneous, authentic, and the term can describe both a style of reading and a style of writing. The result of such tumultuous scholarship is the patchwork of the adages.

In the latter half of the sixteenth century, the French humanist Adrien Turnèbe redeploys many of these same metaphors in his *Adversaria*, which demonstrates the continuing vitality of the rhapsodic method. In the dedicatory epistle to Michel de l'Hôpital, Turnèbe insists that in the course of haphazard reading, he has noted down whatever came to mind without stopping to think.<sup>10</sup> He calls this procedure *tumultuaria scriptura*. Later he defines the title of his work in the following terms: "Adversaria autem codices sunt tumultuarii qui nos advertunt et memoriae causa fiunt" (Turnèbe 226). Here the adjective *tumultuarius*, applied to codices, seems to mean improvised or hastily compiled notebooks. Elsewhere Turnèbe describes how his chapters have grown as if by sewing together different materials, so that he seems to have sutured together his own cento: "Sic enim mihi capita crescunt, varia tanquam consarcinando, ut centonum imitari videar sutelam."<sup>11</sup> Turnèbe's "varia consarcinando" is a

9 For this esthetic, see Jean-Marc Chatelain, "Les recueils d'*adversaria* aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles: des pratiques de la lecture savante au style d'érudition" in *Le livre et l'historien* (Geneva, 1997) 168–186.

10 Adrien Turnèbe, *Adversariorum libri triginta: in tres tomos divisi*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1580) unpaginated epistle Ad Michaellem Hospitalem: "et ut quemque librum prehenderam, quicquid ex tempore subitoque in mentem veniebat, tumultuaria scriptura comprehendebam."

11 Quoted in Chatelain, "Les recueils d'*adversaria*," 182, note 43.

tribute to Erasmus' "tam varia consarcinatio" and a testimony to the prestige of textile and sartorial metaphors in the long humanist succession.

Many of these metaphors reappear in vernacular texts in the course of the sixteenth century. We will take a detailed look at the figurative use of the verbs *coudre*, *découdre* and *raplécer* in Montaigne's *Essais*, but before doing so, we can mention a few uses of the term "rhapsody" in the vernacular. Antoine Macault dedicated his French translation of Erasmus' *Apophthegmata* to King François I, to whom he declares:

Je tousjours desireux de vous presenter encores chose qui se peust gecter dedans les coffres de vostre librairie de chambre . . . ay choisi entre mes traductions de lannee passee les rapsodies ou marqueterie que Erasme a assemblees des Apophthegmes escritz par ledit Plutarque principalement, et aussi par quelques autres authours.<sup>12</sup>

For Macault, who has no reason to disparage what he translates, Erasmus' work is a rhapsody or a marquetry, and we will see both terms used by Montaigne to designate his essays. Macault's use of "rapsodies" seems neither laudatory nor pejorative but simply evocative of the way in which the compiler of commonplaces pieces together his material. From the end of the sixteenth century, René Radouant has found a clearly pejorative use of rhapsody in a legal remonstrance of 1595 by the little known lawyer Guillaume Ranchin, who chides his colleagues in the legal profession for their intemperate citation of commonplaces: "d'autres auroient peur d'estre estimez indoctes s'ils n'avoient traitté en un plaidoyé quelque beau lieu commun et enfilé là-dessus tout ce qu'ils trouvent de recueilly dans les amas et rapsodies de nostre temps."<sup>13</sup> Among the rhapsodies of his era, Ranchin may well have in mind Zwinger's *Theatrum humanae vitae* if not Erasmus' *Adages* or even Montaigne's *Essais*, newly edited in 1595. Finally, when Montaigne refers disparagingly to commonplace books as "ces pastissages de lieux communs, dequoy tant de gents mesnagent leur estude" (111,12,1056), his first translator John Florio renders the phrase as "These rapsodies of common places, wherewith so many stufte their study."<sup>14</sup> While Montaigne calls the authors of such compilations "ravaudeurs," a synonym of

12 *Les apophthegmes. Cest a dire promptz subtilz et sententieux ditz . . . Translatez de Latin en francoys, par lesleu Macault notaire, secretaire, et vallet de chambre du Roy* (Paris, 1539) a vii v°.

13 Guillaume Du Vair, *De l'eloquence françoise*, ed. René Radouant (Paris, 1907) 170.

14 Quoted in Francis Goyet, "The Word 'Commonplaces' in Montaigne" in *Toward a Definition of Topos*, ed. Lynette Hunter (London, 1991) 66–77; 69. All quotations of Montaigne are



“raccommodeur,” Florio accentuates the metaphor in his translation “botcherly-patchcoates” (Goyet 68). Here, indeed, “nullum fert laudis rhapsodus.”

The brief and unremarkable essay “Ceremonie de l'entreveuë des roys” begins with the provocative claim: “Il n'est subject si vain, qui ne merite un rang en cette rapsodie” (1,13,48). We know Montaigne's enthusiasm for vanity, expressed in the essay “De la vanité” and elsewhere, but here, and nowhere else, he calls his work a rhapsody. This dubious self-designation seems to be another instance of what Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani has called “le geste de dévalorisation des *Essais*.”<sup>15</sup> She would derive this oft-repeated gesture from the author's concern to justify his new genre of the essay, incompatible with existing generic conventions. Yet, when Montaigne calls his work a rhapsody, he invokes a very familiar, if not very prestigious genre of humanist prose, as we have been at pains to demonstrate. The opening sentence of essay 1,13 is a declaration of the conventional or the commonplace, linking the two books of essays published in 1580 with the humanist miscellany practiced throughout the century. The essayist enrolls himself in the confraternity of compilers reworking discarded strands of tradition into a curious and motley fabric.

If we follow Montaigne's sewing metaphors with the aid of that modern rhapsody, the concordance, we first alight on a phrase from the essay “Si le chef d'une place assiegée doit sortir pour parlementer” (1,5). Here the verb *coudre* is part of a figurative saying that exemplifies the amorality of the moderns:

Quant à nous, moins superstitieux, qui tenons celui avoir l'honneur de la guerre, qui en a le profit, et qui apres Lysander, disons que où la peau du lion ne peut suffire, il y faut coudre un lopin de celle du renard, les plus ordinaires occasions de surprinse se tirent de cette praticque . . . 1,5,26

To sew the fox skin to the lion skin, or “si leonis exuvium non sufficit, adde vulpinum,” as Lysander used to say in Erasmus' translation, means to supplement force with guile, or simply to cheat when the stakes get high.<sup>16</sup> This was a well circulated commonplace in Renaissance culture, as criticism has not failed to remark,<sup>17</sup> and its moral ambivalence proved irresistible to compil-

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taken from Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. Pierre Villey and V.L. Saulnier (Paris, 1978). The *Essais* are cited by book, chapter, page.

15 Mathieu-Castellani, *Montaigne ou la vérité du mensonge* (Geneva, 2000) 63.

16 See adage 2481 *Si leonina pellis non satis est, vulpina addenda* (ASD II-5:337) and *Apophthegmata* book one, Lysander 91 (ASD IV-4:135) from Plutarch *Moralia* 229B.

17 See Edwin Duval, *The Design of Rabelais's Pantagruel* (New Haven, 1991) 96–99 and Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History* (Ithaca, 1990) 43–44, 70.



ers like Erasmus, whose collection of *Apophthegmata* retails Lysander's shady dealings in admiring detail while insisting that we shouldn't pay attention: "In hoc exemplo nihil est imitandum" (ASD IV-4:135). Montaigne insinuates that Lysander has more in common with the moderns than the ancients since he speaks for us, "nous," when he advocates fraud. In Montaigne's formulation, the verb *coudre* conveys a certain sense of dexterity and resourcefulness and suggests the ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. Indeed, it may signify the adaptability of the essayist himself, who usually professes a taste for improvisation in speech and writing, an affinity for what he calls "le parler prompt" (I,10), which exhibits itself precisely in such forms as the *apophthegma*.<sup>18</sup> Because of his gift for improvisation, Lysander is a model of the essayist: "in hoc exemplo aliquid est imitandum." Moreover, the object of the verb *coudre*, the noun *lopin* will reappear in other contexts where Montaigne reflects on his rhapsodic method.

Elsewhere in the essays, to patch or to sew designates the task of the compiler, whether he compiles essays or fictional narratives. From the end of book two, the essay "De trois bonnes femmes" (II,35) remembers three Roman matrons who committed suicide rather than survive their ill or proscribed husbands. The narrator follows up his three tales with the declaration "Voilà mes trois contes tres-veritables" (II,35,749), and he wonders why other "conteurs," other than himself, go to the trouble of making up their stories when they could simply choose among ten thousand stories they find in books. All they need to bring to this ready-made material is "la liaison," the thread to bind together their stories: "à peu pres comme Ovide a cousu et r'apicé sa Metamorphose, de ce grand nombre de fables diverses." We may understand that the author of essay II,35 has learned his technique from Ovid the rhapsode, whose *Metamorphoses* played such a key part in Montaigne's earliest literary training (I,26,175). When Ovid is the subject, the verb *rapicé* seems to be above reproach, but otherwise its connotations are largely negative. In his essay on education "De l'institution des enfans," Montaigne accuses his contemporaries of injustice and cowardice for not making any effort to conceal their textual larceny:

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18 For Tineke ter Meer, "Apophthegms can be described as pointed remarks which characterized the person who expressed them" ASD IV-4:3. Such characterization naturally weakens with reappropriation. For Montaigne's use of apophthegms, see Robert Kilpatrick, "Et nous enfermons de nos armes": Self-irony and Paradox in 'Du pedantisme,'" *Montaigne Studies* 25 (2013) 219–23.

De faire ce que j'ay descouvert d'aucuns, se couvrir des armes d'autrui, jusques à ne montrer pas seulement le bout de ses doigts, conduire son dessein, comme il est aysé aux sçavans en une matiere commune, sous les inventions anciennes rappieçées par cy par là: à ceux qui les veulent cacher et faire propres, c'est premierement injustice et lascheté. 1,26,148

Here the essayist purports to disdain the piecework that is so characteristic of Renaissance humanism, but what has he done to escape his own indictment? In the essay “De l'amitié,” which was originally intended to frame the text of Etienne de La Boétie's *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, Montaigne compares his work to the marginal ornamentation of a wall painting surrounded by grotesque motifs, which he writes as “crotesques” in order to remind us of *crottes* or excrement: “Que sont-ce icy aussi, à la verité, que crotesques et corps monstrueux, rappieçez de divers membres, sans certaine figure, n'ayants ordre, suite ny proportion que fortuite?” (1,28,183). Surely this is another gesture of devaluation by an author who prefers the low end of the esthetic scale of values. Montaigne's ambitions seem to be eccentric, marginal, fantastic, and unstable, even blank like the “vide tout autour” which his work claims to fill in relation to the borrowed centerpiece. Yet, as a patchwork “rappieçez de divers membres,” the essays are thoroughly and provocatively conventional. They are part of the fabric of Renaissance culture.

Another term from this same lexical constellation is “tissu” or “tissure” which can designate a text or a cloth. In “De l'institution des enfans,” where he condemns piecework, the essayist is willing to make an exception for the cento, “cecy ne touche pas des centons qui se publient pour centons” (1,26,148). We have already seen how, for Erasmus, the word *cento* can take on a positive or negative connotation while maintaining the same proximity to rhapsody. Montaigne admires the cento when it is the product of an artful weaving like the *Politicorum libri septem* of Justus Lipsius: “Ce sont des esprits qui se font voir et par ailleurs et par là, comme Lipsius en ce docte et laborieux tissu de ses Politiques” (1,26,148). Before Montaigne added this phrase to the Exemplaire de Bordeaux, Lipsius had sent him a letter announcing the imminent publication of his work: “et nescio quid in Politicis brevi dabo, meo textu, non tamen filo.”<sup>19</sup> Here Lipsius recognizes as his own the *textus* but not the *filum*: others' words make up his book, just as his own words have entered Montaigne's book. The learned and laborious tissue of Lipsius' *Politica*, from which the *Essais*

19 Letter to Montaigne of 3 Kalends September 1589 in *Epistolarum selectarum miscellanea* (Antwerp, 1614) 175.

borrow liberally without acknowledgment, are a model as well as a source of Montaigne's own text.

What is sewn must come unsewn, just as the gem must be reset and the frozen words thaw, and so the adjective *décousu* plays a far from negligible role in the lexicon of the *Essais*. In "De l'institution des enfans," the essayist describes his preferred style of speech with an evocative series of adjectives including "descousu":

Le parler que j'ayme, c'est un parler simple et naif, tel sur le papier qu'à la bouche; un parler succulent et nerveux, court et serré, non tant delicat et peigné comme vehement et brusque: "Haec demum sapiet dictio, quae feriet," plustost difficile qu'ennuieux, esloigné d'affectation, desreglé, descousu et hardy: chaque lopin y face son corps . . . I,26,171–172

The bold, unraveled style which Montaigne loves cultivates the figure of *hiatus* or rupture and refuses the syntactic connections of the periodic style.<sup>20</sup> He does not want us to see the stitches of his text: "Je n'ayme point de tissure où les liaisons et les coutures paroissent" (172), because such stitching reveals the effort and the artifice of rhetoric. Each *lopin* or member of the phrase should stand alone, just as our thoughts arise haphazardly, before we connect them and disguise their incoherence in written expression. Here, the term "descousu" signals the mimetic ambitions of Montaigne's prose, which emulates the spontaneity of thought.

The adverbial phrase "à pièces décousues" qualifies the style of reading and writing that Montaigne finds most congenial to his aristocratic leisure. He likes Plutarch and Seneca, he tells us in the essay "Des livres" (II,10), because they do not write systematic treatises like professional philosophers but instead practice discontinuous forms of prose:

la science que j'y cherche, y est traictée à pieces décousues, qui ne demandent pas l'obligation d'un long travail, dequoy je suis incapable, comme sont les Opusculs de Plutarque et les Epistres de Seneque, qui est la plus belle partie de ses escrits, et la plus profitable. II,10,413

The various treatises of Plutarch and letters of Seneca are not meant to be read in sequence and don't require a continuous or unrelenting effort from

20 See Michel Magnien, "Un écho de la querelle cicéronienne à la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle: éloquence et imitation dans les *Essais*" in *Rhétorique de Montaigne*, ed. Frank Lestringant (Paris, 1985) 85–99.

their readers. Moreover, they both structure their texts around commonplaces, especially Plutarch, who generates his text from sayings, examples, or verse quotations which are then easily detached from the *Moralia* and collected in dictionaries and repertoires, whence they flow into new compilations like the *Essais*. To sew these places or *lieux* too tightly into the fabric of one's text, so they couldn't be detached, would jeopardize their circulation. The way that Plutarch and Seneca write is, not surprisingly, the way that Montaigne likes to read, as he tells us in "De trois commerces" (III,3) where he describes his "librairie" or study:

Chez moy, je me destourne un peu plus souvent à ma librairie, d'où tout d'une main je commande à mon mesnage. . . . Là, je feuillette à cette heure un livre, à cette heure un autre, sans ordre et sans dessein, à pieces descousues; tantost je resve, tantost j'enregistre et dicte, en me promenant, mes songes que voicy. III,3,828

Having previously characterized his essays as "n'ayants ordre, suite ny proportion que fortuite" (I,28,183), their author now says that he conducts his reading "sans ordre et sans dessein." Already at the stage of reading, his project is a rhapsody, before it is ever written down.

In the essay "De l'experience" (III,13), where Montaigne describes the most minute and, to some readers, the most impertinent details of his personal hygiene, he refers to some notes or memoranda which he has made about the symptoms of his illness. Whenever some new crisis announces itself, he leafs through these dispersed notes like so many Sibylline leaves in order to prophesy his recovery: "si quelque estonnement me menace, feuilletant ces petits brevets descousus comme des feuilles Sybillines, je ne faux plus de trouver où me consoler de quelque pronostique favorable en mon experience passée" (III,13,1092). Apparently, the patient has left his memoranda in loose-leaf form so they do not make a book, but only the raw material of a book. This is one implication of *décousu*. Words or thoughts that remain unsewn have not yet been published in book form, and the *Essais* themselves evince a strange reluctance to acknowledge their own public status, preferring to be taken as a private communication, for a neighbor, a relative, or a friend.<sup>21</sup> This incongruous claim to privacy in a published work may be understood in relation to the ideal of "le parler décousu," which designates not only a discontinuous, impromptu style but also an unbound text.

21 "C'est pour le coin d'une librairie, et pour en amuser un voisin, un parent, un amy" (II,18,664).

Moreover, Montaigne's medical records are like the proverbial *folia Sibyllae*, itself a commonplace metaphor for the humanist method of composition. In Erasmus' incurious commentary, the adage *Sibyllae folium* (691) merely means having the authority of an oracle, with examples from Juvenal, Aristophanes, and Virgil, and with little or no attention to the ideas of dispersal and disorder. However, for other sixteenth-century writers, the same adage is an irresistible figure for literary composition. In the prefatory address to the reader at the head of his verse collection *Divers jeux rustiques*, Joachim Du Bellay explains his reluctance to bring before the public such negligible verse, and he insists that he was only induced to do so for fear of unauthorized editions with their deplorable textual corruption. Such was the reason that constrained him to gather these loose leaves:

Ce qui m'a contrainct de recueillir par cy par là, comme les feuilletts de la Sibylle, toutes ces petites pièces assez mal cousues, mais qui, peult estre, ne te donneront moins de plaisir que beaucoup d'autres plus graves, plus polies et mieux agencées.<sup>22</sup>

Here we may recognize both figures used in similar proximity in "De l'experience": "les feuilletts de la Sibylle" and "ces pièces mal cousues." By such figures, the poetic compiler announces a loose, unpremeditated arrangement that suits a spontaneous vein of poetry. For a similar instance of Sibylline leaves in Latin prose, we can return to the dedicatory epistle of the *Adversaria*, where Adrien Turnèbe tells Michel de l'Hôpital how he wrote his humanist miscellany. From whatever book was at hand, he would immediately jot down whatever came to mind without stopping to think. Later, he would copy his notes onto new pages, like so many Sibylline leaves, without any regard for order but all in haste, as his book itself shows well enough.<sup>23</sup> Turnèbe's method of copying *nullo delectu ordineque* matches Montaigne's method of reading and writing "sans ordre et sans dessein," and both are inspired by the Sibyl. For Turnèbe, Sibylline leaves denote a loose method of composition that is faithful to the original process of research and annotation. Similarly, Turnèbe's admirer Montaigne wants his writing to be or to appear faithful to the conception of his thoughts without appearing to correct or reformulate those thoughts.

22 Joachim Du Bellay, *Divers jeux rustiques*, ed. V.L. Saulnier (Geneva, 1947) 3.

23 Adrien Turnèbe (as in note 10 above): "interdum oblitus quid ante annotassem, illud idem in alia charta iterabam, omnia quidem fere velut folia Sibyllae non in numerum digesta, sed nullo delectu ordineque descripta (quod et ipse de se liber vel me tacente indicabit) temere inconditeque scribebam."

From “De l’experience,” the last essay in Montaigne’s book, we take our final instance of *décousu*. Montaigne applies the term to his faculty of judgment, which he has honed by observing himself and writing his essays. Such experience has taught him the fallacy of sweeping, definitive judgments: “je prononce ma sentence par articles descousus, ainsi que de chose qui ne se peut dire à la fois et en bloc” (III,13,1076). The experienced judge only pronounces sentence intermittently and tentatively, case by case or “par articles descousus.” Here “descousu” means discontinuous and perhaps inconstant. In his very first essay, he warned us of the difficulty of judging the human subject: “Il est malaisé d’y fonder jugement constant et uniforme” (I,1,9). We have to unravel our judgment before such an amorphous object. To describe the human condition, the essay “De l’inconstance de nos actions” remarks simply, “Nostre fait, ce ne sont que pieces rapportées” (II,1,336) by which I understand him to mean that the human being is a patchwork of irreconcilable impulses and contradictory characteristics. To reinforce his point, he marshals a few more rhapsodic metaphors: “Nous sommes tous de lopins, et d’une contexture si informe et diverse, que chaque piece, chaque momant, fait son jeu” (II,1,337). *Contexture* joins the constellation of terms used to evoke the motley quality of texts, clothes, and conduct in the essays. With Montaigne, rhapsody becomes a sort of anthropology or writing suited to humans.

Through this pattern of figurative language of sewing and unsewing the fabric of speech, Montaigne puts his work under the auspices of a classical commonplace that enjoyed a great deal of currency in sixteenth-century Europe: Penelope’s web. Erasmus explains the adage *Penelopes telam retexere* as a figure of futility, and he finds it apt to satirize the endless arguments of the scholastic philosophers. Folly uses this *locus* in her monologue when she imagines the endless debate of equally stubborn adversaries in a scholastic *disputatio*: “tum enim nihil aliud quam tela Penelopes retexeretur” (ASD IV-3:154). She even proposes to send the Scotists and Ockhamists off to defeat the Turks in crusade, trusting to their obstinacy in polemic. Erasmus’ critique of the scholastics follows Cicero’s critique of dialectic. In book two of the *De oratore*, Antonius arguing with Catulus disputes the pretension of dialectic to adjudicate between truth and falsehood. The dialecticians get so involved in their own arguments, he maintains, that they not only discover problems which they cannot solve but they also reweave what they have unwoven (2.158). Here, the allusion to Penelope remains implicit, but it becomes explicit in the *Academica priora*. In this dialogue, Lucullus cleverly elicits the skeptical potential of dialectic to disprove what it has proven and thus to induce the suspension of judgment or what the Greeks call ἐποχή and Cicero calls “adsensionis

retentio" (*Academica* 2.59). Lucullus compares this self-neutralizing property to Penelope's web: "Quid quod eadem illa ars, quasi Penelope telam retexens, tollit ad extremum superiora?" (*Academica* 2.95). In this way we see that the *tela Penelopes* is not necessarily a satiric topos for those who welcome the irresolution of argument.

Erasmus, in his commentary on this passage from the *Academica* for his *Adagia*, says that dialectic uses the very same reasons to deny something that it has already used to affirm it, so that nothing seems to have been achieved (ASD II-1:443). This stalemate of reason, we may add, encourages the suspension of judgment that Montaigne cultivates in his essays. More generally, Penelope's perpetually woven web may be an apt figure for the ceaseless circulation of commonplaces, which also have the potential to deny what they affirm. Between Cicero and Erasmus, Poliziano uses Penelope's web unsatirically in his *Praelectio de dialectica* in order to advertise the comprehensive scope of dialectic, which covers the whole realm of the intelligible backward and forward, "telam quidem Penelopes exemplo modo texens, modo retexens."<sup>24</sup> In this way, the figure of the *tela Penelopes* reweaves what it unweaves, defending in Poliziano what it attacks in Cicero and Erasmus, and encouraging the kind of neutrality celebrated in Montaigne.

This figure may be likened, finally, to another commonplace that Montaigne uses at the outset of his essay on education where he describes his own desultory reading habits. As if to disqualify his own pedagogical credentials, he declares: "Je n'ay dressé commerce avec aucun livre solide, sinon Plutarque et Seneque, où je puyse comme les Danaïdes, remplissant et versant sans cesse" (I,26,146). This mythological image of filling and emptying, whose postmodern implications have been elicited by Terence Cave,<sup>25</sup> seems in harmony with the images of sewing and unraveling or weaving and unweaving which we have been collecting in this chapter. The Danaids' labor is a punishment, Penelope's a ruse, and Montaigne's a form of entertainment, but they all participate in the endless irresolution of commonplace culture.

This process reaches a sort of paroxysm in early seventeenth-century England with Robert Burton's commonplace book *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, which owes so much to Montaigne. His manic preface entitled "Democritus Junior to the Reader" alerts us from the very start to the rhapsodic character

24 Angelo Poliziano, *Omnia opera* (Venice, 1498; reprint Rome, 1968) bb i r<sup>o</sup>.

25 Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text* (Oxford, 1979) 171–72 and 271–72.



of his dubious achievement.<sup>26</sup> Signaling his complicity with Penelope, the author declares, “we weave the same Web still, twist the same Rope againe and againe” (10), and he readily grants that his work is no better than “a Rapsody of Rags gathered together from severall Dung-hills” (12). Montaigne has nothing on Burton when it comes to “le geste de dévalorisation.” In their commentary *ad locum*, the editors of the Oxford critical edition of the *Anatomy* recognize similar uses of “rhapsody” in seventeenth-century English prose by John Florio and Sir Thomas Browne.<sup>27</sup> Styling his work a “Chaos” and a “Cento” (11) as well as a rhapsody, Burton makes a compulsive use of adages and other forms of citation; and in the best tradition of Erasmian irony, he cannot resist serving us a generous portion of twice-cooked cabbage: “Yes but you will infer, that this is *actum agere*, an unnecessary worke, *cramben bis coctam apponere*, the same againe and againe in other words” (8). The adage *bis cocta crambe* or *recocta crambe*, whereby Erasmus introduced his *Collectanea* to Lord Mountjoy (ASD II-9:46) and which Burton repeats twice more in the *Anatomy* (341, 378), acknowledges the sensation of nausea induced by the saturation of commonplace culture. With an exquisite sense of impropriety, he appropriates that venerable motto of moderation, *ne quid nimis*, inserted into the third edition of his work as a premature announcement of his retirement from writing: “But I am now resolved never to put this Treatise out againe, *Ne quid nimis*, I will not hereafter adde, alter, or retract, I have done” (20). In fact, he has only begun.

Burton relies as much on allusion as on citation. If Montaigne insists, disingenuously, “j’ajoute, mais je ne corrige pas” (III,9,963), Burton claims not to have “revised the Copie, and amended the stile, which now flowes remisly as it was first conceived” (16). For lack of leisure, he has been obliged to publish his work “as it was first written *quicquid in buccam venit*, in an extemporean stile, as I doe commonly all other exercises, *effudi quicquid dictavit Genius meus*, out of a confused company of notes, and writ with as small deliberation as I doe ordinarily speake” (17). Like Folly and the poet of the *Regrets*,<sup>28</sup> Burton writes whatever comes into his mouth, *quicquid in buccam venit*, honoring an epistolary topos inaugurated by Cicero when he exhorted Atticus to write whatever he felt like in case there was no news to report: “Aut si nihil erit, quod in buccam

26 All quotations of Burton are taken from *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, vol. 1, eds. Faulkner, Kiessling, and Blair (Oxford, 1989).

27 Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, vol. 4, eds. Bamborough and Dodsworth (Oxford, 1998) 28.

28 See our chapter 1, note 15.



venerit scribes" (*Ad Atticum* 14.7 quoted in Adage 472, ASD II-1:546).<sup>29</sup> His "confused company of notes" puts him in good company with Adrien Turnèbe and others who work with the Sibylline leaves. Finally, if the English Democritus writes with as little deliberation as he speaks, then he honors Montaigne's ideal of style, "tel sur le papier qu'à la bouche" (I,26,171). To cut a very long story short, the preface to the reader of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, which in a sense responds to Sabellico's enigmatic address *ad Democritum suum*, can be taken less as a gesture of humility or self-deprecation, than as a tribute to Montaigne and the waning tradition of humanism.

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29 Marc Antoine Muret honors the same topos in a vernacular epistle to Aldo Manuzio il giovane, whom he encourages to write *quicquid in buccam*, promising to do the same for his part. See Girot (2012) 393.

## The Mosaic of Speech

In his classic study *Hacia Cervantes*, where he reconstitutes the cultural context of Cervantes' novel *Don Quijote*, the great Hispanist Américo Castro devotes a chapter to Juan de Mal Lara's *Philosophia vulgar* (Seville, 1568), which is a vast collection of Spanish proverbs. Situating the work within Renaissance commonplace culture, Castro demonstrates how Mal Lara constructs his introduction from the *Prolegomena* to Erasmus' *Adages* and from other antecedent texts as well. For Castro, Mal Lara's method of composition is characteristic of humanism: "La cultura humanística es, ante todo, labor de taracea."<sup>1</sup> *Taracea*, like the Italian *tarsia*, designates inlay work or marquetry, which, as we shall see, is closely related to mosaic. Castro's metaphor is all the more apt for being itself a piece of the humanist mosaic. This chapter will trace the humanist obsession with mosaic as a figure of speech more than a genre of visual art.

As we recall, Erasmus uses the figure of the mosaic, at times disparagingly and at times approvingly, to evoke the intertextual practices of ancient and modern authors. He also assimilates the textual mosaic to the *cento* and the rhapsody as composite forms that rework the fragments of tradition into new and at times disconcerting patterns. The most interesting use of the mosaic topos in the passages which we examined in the previous chapter may be the rather elaborate metaphor of the Christian mosaic reassembled from the fragments of a pagan mosaic, which he likens to the neo-Latin Christian epics and the Ciceronian orations of Christian orators who reuse the fragments of pre-Christian Latin literature. Here is the phrase from Bulephorus' lecture to Nosoponus near the end of the *Dialogus Ciceronianus*:

Tell me this, Nosoponus. If someone were to break up a mosaic with a fine representation of the rape of Ganymede, and try to rearrange the same stones to depict Gabriel bringing the celestial message to the maiden of Nazareth, wouldn't the resulting work be stiff and unsatisfactory, not because the materials were bad, but because they did not fit the requirements of the subject?<sup>2</sup> CWE 28:438–439

1 Américo Castro, *Hacia Cervantes* (Madrid, 1967) 179.

2 "Dic mihi Nosopone, si quis argumentum rapti Ganymedis, eleganter constructum operae Musaico dissolvat, et iisdem tessellis aliter concinnatis exprimere conetur, Gabrielem

A mosaic (*opera Musaica*) consists of pieces of stone or glass (*tessel-lae*) arranged (*concinnatae*) to form an image, and these same pieces can be rearranged (*aliter concinnatae*) to represent a new subject (*argumentum*). Christians should make their own mosaics, Bulephorus implies, without recycling pagan materials unsuited to the new iconography (*minus argumento congruentibus*). This is a feasible esthetic program since little stones are not a scarce commodity or even a finite resource.

Yet, what would the analogy be to speech? How can Christian writers compose their texts without reusing the *tessellae* or basic units of the Latin language conserved in classical literature? The obvious answer would be for Christian contemporaries of Erasmus to write in the vernacular, which Erasmus will not do. Thus the figure of the mosaic betrays the aporia in Erasmus' logic. Neither he nor his fellow humanists, whether they be eclectics or Ciceronians, can write Latin without producing the type of recycled mosaic that Bulephorus judges a failure (*parum felix opus*). The metaphor of the mosaic, especially when extended as it is here in Erasmus' dialogue, expresses humanism's anxiety about the validity of its own project and its own medium. The mosaic is a deeply ambivalent figure of repetition and imitation and of the unmalleable hardness of the *durum opus*. In this way, mosaic works against metaphors of fluidity and movement and the thermal cycle of freezing and thawing words. *Tessellae* may be like the gems that are reset and revitalized in new contexts, but in Erasmus' usage they seem inert and inadaptably. These are the properties that initially characterize the mosaic of speech.

In the Renaissance, mosaic seems to have prospered as a metaphor even as it lost its once prestigious status as an art form. Most historical surveys of the art of mosaic regard the Renaissance as a period of decadence and decline, but the same era witnessed a tremendous revival of the classical topos of the mosaic of speech.<sup>3</sup> To appreciate this renascent figure of speech, we need to return to its source in classical literature. Our genealogy begins with the ancient Roman satirist Lucilius, whose work survives in over one thousand fragments arranged into thirty books of satires. The second book is a parody of the trial of Quintus Mucius Scaevola, who was prosecuted for extortion in 119 BC by Titus Albucius supposedly in retaliation for Scaevola's public ridicule of Albucius' Greek

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coeleste nuncium adferentem virgini Nazarenae, nonne durum parumque felix opus nasce-tur, ex optimis quidem tessellis, sed minus argumento congruentibus" ASD 1-2:702.

3 Manuela Farneti voices the orthodox view when she declares, "Il XIII secolo segna l'inizio della parabola discendente dell'arte musiva e della visione estetica che essa aveva espresso." *Glossario tecnico-storico del mosaico* (Ravenna, 1993) 46. I have relied on this work for the definition of technical terms associated with the art of mosaic.

affectations.<sup>4</sup> As reported by Lucilius, Scaevola satirizes Albucius' use of Greek words, such as *lexis*, as if they were little cubes arranged in a mosaic pavement, which was itself a Greek art form imported to Rome:

Quam lepide lexis compostae ut tesserulae omnes  
arte pavimento atque emblemate vermiculato!<sup>5</sup>

Albucius' speech is like a mosaic because of his over-careful composition and especially because of his conspicuous mixture of Greek and Latin words. The analogy is clearly pejorative and may even appeal to Roman nativism or xenophobia.

Like so many parodists, however, Lucilius was notorious for affecting the same style which he ridiculed in others—in this case the promiscuous use of Greek terms. For this we have Horace's testimony in the satires. Poem 4 of the first book of satires criticizes Lucilius for his harsh style and too prolific output, comparing his poetry to a muddy stream (*Sermones* 1.4.11), while poem 10 adds the further accusation of excessive borrowing from Greek. Here, Horace imagines an admirer of Lucilius' style who defends the mixture of Greek and Latin: "at magnum fecit quod verbis Graeca Latinis / miscuit" (*Sermones* 1.10.20–21), to which Horace responds that he does not see anything difficult or amazing in that ("quine putetis difficile et mirum?"), and he wonders whether partisans of Lucilius would practice bilingualism not only in verse but also in forensic rhetoric (1.10.21–26). Horace denounces Lucilian bilingualism as an offense to the *patria*: "patriis intermiscere petita / verba foris malis, Canusini more bilinguis?" (1.10.29–30).<sup>6</sup> These verses strike a nativist stance against the sort of bilingualism associated with the Greek colony of Canusium in Italy.<sup>7</sup>

Lucilius' image of the mosaic of speech made a profound impression on Cicero, for it reappears in three of his rhetorical treatises. Cicero introduces the image in book 3 of the *De oratore*, where Crassus defines *conlocatio* or arrangement of words. For Crassus, the orator must arrange his words so that they fit together snugly or tightly, without asperity or hiatus: "ut neve asper eorum

4 In the *Brutus* 26.102, Cicero mentions that Scaevola was prosecuted "de pecuniis repetundis" while he explains the motivation for this prosecution in *De finibus bonorum et malorum* 1.3.8.

5 Lucilius, *Carminum reliquiae*, ed. Friedrich Marx, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1904) fr. 84–85. "How charmingly the words are joined together, like little cubes all artfully inlaid in a mosaic pavement."

6 "Do you prefer to intermix native words with words sought from abroad, in the manner of bilingual Canusium?"

7 See Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1879) s.v. "Canusium" p. 282. Horace is apparently the only authority for Canusium's bilingualism.

concursum neve hiulus sit" (3.43.171). This is the subject on which Lucilius made his joke about mosaic, which Cicero quotes, but with an important reservation. Despite Lucilius' irony, collocation must be scrupulously observed: "Sed est tamen haec conlocatio conservanda verborum, de qua loquor" (3.43.172). So, in this first instance, the citation of Lucilius functions primarily as an anecdote without any pejorative force.

Lucilius' mosaic reappears in a more ambivalent light in the *Orator*, where Cicero considers the aspects of elocution which appeal to the ear, including *compositio* or the connection between the end of one word and the beginning of the next. It is to illustrate his definition of *compositio* that he cites Lucilius' verses:

And now let us examine that first point, which requires extreme care, so that there may be a certain structure and yet not a laborious one, for otherwise the effort would be quite futile. This is why Scaevola cleverly mocks Albucius in Lucilius' satire: 'How charmingly the words are joined together, like little cubes all artfully inlaid in a mosaic pavement.' I do not want such a meticulous construction to be apparent; but in any event a practiced pen will easily effect a formula of composition. For just as the eye in reading, so the mind in speaking looks forward to what follows lest the sequence between the end of one word and the beginning of the next should produce hiatus or asperity.<sup>8</sup> *Orator* 44.149–150

The main principle, which is enunciated at the very end of this passage, is once again to avoid either hiatus or cacophony, "aut hiulcas voces . . . aut asperas." As Cicero acknowledges, however, *compositio* is tricky, "maxime desiderat diligentiam," because although there must be a structure, an architecture of words, it must not appear laborious: "ut fiat quasi structura quaedam nec tamen fiat operose." For if the composition is too obtrusive, we end up with Lucilius' mosaic of speech. Here the mosaic is a figure for "minuta constructio" or an

8 Atque illud primum videamus quale sit, quod vel maxime desiderat diligentiam, ut fiat quasi structura quaedam nec tamen fiat operose; nam esset cum infinitum tum puerilis labor; quod apud Lucilium scite exagitat in Albucio Scaevola:

"quam lepide lexis compostae ut tesserulae omnes  
arte pavimento atque emblemate vermiculato!"

Nolo haec tam minuta constructio appareat; sed tamen stilus exercitatus efficiet facile formulam componendi. Nam ut in legendo oculus sic animus in dicendo prospiciet quid sequatur, ne extremorum verborum cum insequentibus primis concursus aut hiulcas voces efficiat aut asperas.

over-careful composition of sounds that could distract us from the subject matter of speech. Mosaic is also the vice of the novice, for practice resolves the problem as Cicero explains alliteratively: “*stilus exercitatus efficiet facile formulam componendi*.” What is particularly revealing is the analogy which Cicero draws between the eye and the ear in the last sentence of the passage quoted: “*ut in legendo oculus sic animus in dicendo*.” As the eye in reading, so the mind in speaking looks forward to what follows so as to avoid asperity or hiatus in the placement of words. This implies that there is a visual equivalent not only to cacophony but also to euphony or proper composition. The mosaic therefore may represent a harmonious blend of colors or forms analogous to the harmonious blend of sounds achieved by *compositio*.<sup>9</sup> Yet the mosaic remains suspect as an obvious form of artifice.

In the *Brutus*, where Cicero reviews the history of Roman eloquence, he praises among his contemporaries the orator Marcus Calpidius, whose style was smooth, supple, and fluent. Calpidius excelled at *conlocatio* so that no word was out of place, just as in Lucilius’ mosaic: “*nullum nisi loco positum et tamquam in vermiculato emblemate, ut ait Lucilius, structum verbum videres*” (*Brutus* 79.274).<sup>10</sup> Here Cicero alludes to Lucilius’ verses through paraphrase without evoking their satiric context, so that the mosaic becomes a positive figure for flawless placement and construction of words. It should be recalled that Cicero later criticizes Calpidius for achieving only two of the three aims of oratory: he was able to delight and to teach but not to move his audience (*Brutus* 80.276). This critique may suggest, however indirectly, an association between mosaic and immobility or verbal apathy.

Quintilian recuperates the pejorative sense of Lucilius’ metaphor in book 9 of the *Institutio oratoria* at the end of a long section devoted to prose rhythm. Here he warns that rhythmic preoccupations ought not to weaken or inhibit speech from flowing and leading the listeners on, according to the formula, “*oratio ferri debet ac fluere*” (9.4.112). Measuring feet and weighing syllables, he insists, is a miserable and minimal occupation which leaves us no time for more important concerns. If we neglect the weight and splendor of the argument for rhythmic precision, our speech will be like Lucilius’ mosaic: “*si quidem relicto rerum pondere ac nitore contempto ‘tesserulas’, ut ait Lucilius, struet et vermiculate inter se lexis committet*” (9.4.113). For Quintilian, mosaic is a figure for excessive formalism which enervates or immobilizes speech

9 Here I follow the suggestion of Albert Yon in the introduction to his edition of Cicero, *L’Orateur* (Paris, 1964) cxiv.

10 “You would not see a single word that was not inserted in its proper place as if inlaid in a fine mosaic, as Lucilius says.”

and sacrifices emotional impact for the sake of pedantic regularity. In effect, mosaic signifies an inversion of esthetic priorities.

Prose rhythm is not the only context in which Quintilian alludes to the mosaic of speech. In book 2 of the *Institutio oratoria* he criticizes the use of commonplaces in forensic oratory. Orators adorn their extemporaneous speeches with these memorized formulae as if they were pieces of a mosaic: “extemporales eorum dictiones his velut emblematis exornarentur” (2.4.27). Unfortunately, such commonplaces are never fully integrated into the circumstances of the case but remain extraneous like appliqué work: “appareatque eum non tam insertum quam adplicitum” (2.4.30). Unless they arise naturally “ex causa,” these set pieces are likely to be “supervacua” and even counter-productive (2.4.32). Already, by the end of the first century AD, Quintilian seems to have established the mosaic as a figure for the misuse of commonplaces, and this usage returns in the Renaissance to betray a sense of insecurity both toward the preponderant role of quotations in humanist culture and the difficulty of assimilating others’ speech into one’s own text. More specifically, Erasmus will remember the satiric force of the formula “velut emblemata” from *Institutio oratoria* 2.4.27.

To recapitulate the meaning of mosaic in the authors we have surveyed thus far, what was for Lucilius a figure for the verbal affectation of mixing Greek and Latin, or foreign and native words, for which Lucilius himself was notorious, becomes for Cicero and Quintilian a figure for formalism or excessive attention to minute detail. For Cicero, the mosaic also has a positive connotation of harmonious structure. Always in the background is the literal sense of mosaic as a work of visual art whose pieces, known as *emblemata*, stand for the elements of speech, whether sounds or letters, which share a capacity for spatial arrangement. This capacity in turn suggests an affinity between speech and visual art. The Renaissance was to exploit all of these connotations in its revival of the mosaic of speech.

Another reference to Lucilius can be found in Pliny’s *Natural History* at the end of book 36 where he discusses *pavimenta* or floor mosaics. Pliny seems indifferent to the original context of Lucilius’ verses, and he cites only the second verse as an historical testimony to the popularity of mosaic before the Cimbrian War of 113 to 101 BC (*NH* 36.185). In this way the analogy of speech and mosaic is lost. Nevertheless, Pliny’s descriptions of mosaic are important, for the terminology he uses and the examples he cites were to prove very popular with certain Renaissance authors whose own style exemplifies the mosaic of speech.

In the fifteenth century, Latin and vernacular humanists revived Lucilius’ metaphor as a means of defining their relationship to classical tradition and

of affirming their own esthetic ideals. The earliest instance of the mosaic of speech in Renaissance literature which I have been able to discover comes from Leonardo Bruni's *De interpretatione recta*, which was composed between 1424 and 1426 in the immediate aftermath of the rediscovery of Cicero's *Brutus*, *Orator*, and the complete text of the *De oratore*.<sup>11</sup> In this treatise on translation, advocating humanist rhetorical adaptation of Greek philosophy over the literal versions produced by medieval scholasticism, Bruni offers an evaluation of Plato's elegant prose style, as illustrated by excerpts from the *Phaedrus*. He is particularly impressed by the "coniunctio verborum" or juxtaposition of words: "hec omnia verba inter se festive coniuncta, tamquam in pavimento ac emblemate vermiculato, summam habent venustatem."<sup>12</sup> This paraphrase of Cicero's quotation of Lucilius is unreservedly laudatory and so resembles most closely the passage from the *Brutus* in praise of Marcus Calpidius. With Bruni, then, the mosaic topos begins its Renaissance career as an encomium, though that emphasis will quickly lapse in the ensuing generations.

The next humanist author to draw an analogy between speech and mosaic is Leon Battista Alberti in his vernacular treatise on the tranquility of the soul, bearing the Latin title *Profugiorum ab Aerumna Libri* and originally composed in 1441. In the third book of this dialogue between Alberti and two of his Florentine friends, Niccola de' Medici praises Agnolo Pandolfini for the admirable style and composition of his moral discourse, which unites the two virtues of "brevità" and "copia."<sup>13</sup> Above all, Pandolfini excels at arranging his material in the proper place and order, much like the anonymous architect who invented the mosaic pavement by arranging the fragments of marble and other precious building material left over from the walls and columns of the temple of Diana at Ephesus (Alberti 160). If mosaic is an art of recycling fragments, or "i minuti rimasugli," so apparently is modern philosophy, which must be pieced together from the remains of the temple of knowledge erected by the ancients (161). Since all texts are built of the same materials, and tradition allows no opportunity for genuine innovation, creativity consists merely in rearranging the pieces of the past into new patterns.<sup>14</sup> Pandolfini is able to

11 For the date of *De interpretatione*, see Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, vol. 2 (Princeton, 1955) 615.

12 Leonardo Bruni, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, ed. Paolo Viti (Turin, 1996) 168. "All these words so graciously combined, as in a mosaic pavement, possess the highest beauty."

13 Leon Battista Alberti, *Opere volgari*, ed. Cecil Grayson, vol. 2 (Bari, 1966) 160.

14 "E veggonsi queste cose litterarie usurpate da tanti, et in tanti loro scritti adoperate e disseminate, che oggi a chi voglia ragionarne resta altro nulla che solo el raccogliere e assortirle e poi accoppiarle insieme con qualche varietà dagli altri e adattezza dell'opera



combine, insert, and frame his borrowed notions brilliantly (162), but such praise does not conceal the subordinate status of his achievement. In this context, the mosaic of speech conveys a sense of belatedness and even futility that may echo Roman ambivalence toward Greek culture.<sup>15</sup>

The next recorded instance of the topos is from the preface to Angelo Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria prima*, which was first published in 1489. Here the adversary of the Ciceronians expounds his ideal of stylistic variety and multiplicity.<sup>16</sup> Invoking such concepts as *varietas*, *disparilitas*, and *dissimilitudo*, Poliziano seeks to justify and in fact to advertise his use of barbarisms, obsolete terms, unusual vocabulary and all his other departures from *consuetudo* or custom. As he openly acknowledges, his commercial and esthetic strategy is to avoid uniformity so that his work may offer something to please everyone from the rude and rustic to the refined and delicate readers. The style that appeals to these latter, the "delicatiores," he designates as "vermiculata dictio et tessellis pluricoloribus variegata."<sup>17</sup> He remembers Lucilius' reference to the "pavimento . . . vermiculato" or floor mosaic composed of the minutest, multicolored pieces of glass, whose undulating shape or arrangement bears some resemblance to a *vermiculus* or little worm. A verbal *opus vermiculatum* must be composed of rare and precious words appealing to the most refined taste, but at the same time it must display a variety of colors or styles in keeping with the qualification "tessellis pluricoloribus variegata." From Poliziano's eclectic point of view, the mosaic of speech suggests the rich variety of the classical heritage, even as it carries with it a connotation of preciousness.

Poliziano's rivals and disciples were quite attentive to the mosaic diction of the master. As Martin McLaughlin has shown, Giorgio Merula was quick to mock Poliziano's "vermiculata dictio" while Francesco Pucci was as quick to

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sua, quasi come suo istituto sia imitare in questo chi altrove fece el pavimento" Alberti 161.

- 15 Roberto Cardini proposes a different reading of this passage, which he regards as an indispensable methodological guide to all humanist texts, in *Mosaici. Il "nemico" dell'Alberti* (Rome, 1990) 4–7. For Cardini, Alberti's metaphor authorizes a critical approach which he calls "smontaggio," dismounting a text to identify its constituent pieces or sources, and which he applies to Alberti's *Intercenales*. Nella Bianchi Bensimon takes this approach to Alberti's *De familia* in "Nihil dictum quin prius dictum: analyse de la méthode compositive chez Leon Battista Alberti" in *La constitution du texte: le tout et ses parties* (Poitiers, 1998) 109–26.
- 16 See Martin McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance* (Oxford, 1995) 196–98.
- 17 Angelo Poliziano, *Omnia opera* (Venice, 1498; reprint Rome, 1968) A ii r<sup>o</sup>. "A mosaic style diversified with multicolored little verbal cubes."

extol it and to pay it the tribute of emulation.<sup>18</sup> Poliziano's main disciple and literary executor, Pietro Crinito devotes a chapter of his humanist miscellany *De honesta disciplina* (22.1) to the subject of mosaic, more as an art historical phenomenon than a rhetorical one. Following Pliny, Crinito distinguishes between *pavimentum*, *asarotum*, and *lithostratum* while citing examples from antiquity and acknowledging modern mosaics from the basilica of St. Peter's in Rome and the Baptistry in Florence.<sup>19</sup> He seems frankly indifferent to the metaphorical potential of his subject, despite its obvious pertinence to his own compilation, which he has pieced together from the remains of antiquity "quasi come suo instituto sia imitare in questo chi altrove fece el pavimento," as Alberti said. Perhaps this chapter on mosaic, imbedded in the larger work, has the function of an *emblem* in the sense that Erasmian humanism ascribed to the term.

One of the first humanist texts to recuperate the original sense of the mosaic as a figure of bilingualism or polyglossia is *The Praise of Folly*, where Erasmus satirizes the ostentation of foolish orators. One form which this ostentation takes is the insertion of Greek words into Latin speech like pieces of a mosaic:

For at this point too I think I should copy the rhetoricians of today who fancy themselves practically gods on earth if they can show themselves twin-tongued, like horse leeches, and think it a splendid feat if they can work a few silly little Greek words, like pieces of a mosaic, into their Latin speeches, however out of place these are.<sup>20</sup> CWE 27:88

With the phrase "vocalas velut emblemata intertexere," Erasmus combines the figure of mosaic with the metaphor of weaving.

Another rhetorical abuse patronized by Folly is archaism or the use of "prisca verba," which she assimilates to bilingualism as two species of the same foolish admiration for the exotic (ASD IV-3:76). Both practices, Hellenism and archaism, are also forms of textual insertion. To elucidate this concept we can

18 Martin McLaughlin, "Poliziano's *Stanze per la giostra*: Postmodern Poetics in a Proto-Renaissance Poem" in *Italy in Crisis 1494*, ed. J. Everson and D. Zancani (Oxford, 2000) 129–151; 144–145.

19 Pietro Crinito, *De honesta disciplina*, ed. Carlo Angeleri (Rome, 1955) 421–23.

20 "Visum est enim hac quoque parte nostri temporis rhetores imitari, qui plane deos esse sese credunt, si hirudinum ritu bilingues appareant, ac praeclarum facinus esse ducunt latinis orationibus subinde graeculas aliquot vocalas velut emblemata intertexere, etiam si nunc non erat his locus" ASD IV-3:76.

refer to the commentary on the *Encomium Moriae* by Erasmus' contemporary Gerard Lister, better known as Listrius, who glosses *emblemata* as follows:

That is, insertions, for that is what the Greek word means. It also means the little cubes used in mosaics or pavements. The Spanish make similar things out of wood, especially in tables. They are called 'emblemata' from the Greek *emballein*, that is, to insert.<sup>21</sup>

Listrius traces the Latin word *emblemata* back to the Greek verb *emballo* or to insert, printed in Greek to emphasize the insertion. This remains even now the standard etymology of the *emblema*, which was the finely detailed centerpiece of a floor mosaic, worked separately and inserted into the pavement at the building site. Erasmus illustrates the technique of textual insertion in the passage quoted above when he transfers a verse from Horace's *Ars poetica*, "sed nunc non erat his locus" (19), into his own text, just after the mosaic metaphor, where it seems to be in the right place to satirize words that are out of place. He also includes a variation on Horace's phrase "Canusini more bilinguis" (*Sermones* 1.10.30) in the more derogatory formula "hirudinum ritu bilingues." So, while seeming to disparage the mosaic of speech, Erasmus constructs a sort of mosaic of intertextual allusions.

Throughout the *Encomium Moriae*, Folly makes quite a profligate use of Greek and Latin proverbs, which she draws from Erasmus' *Adages* and inserts into her own monologue "velut emblemata." For instance, when praising rhetorical ostentation, she gloats that people admire most what they least understand, hoping to dissimulate ignorance through applause:

And the more pretentious among them have to laugh and clap their hands and twitch their ears like a donkey does to show the others how well they can understand. So much for that.<sup>22</sup> CWE 27:88

Here, Folly has inserted a few Greek phrases at the end of her remarks including a variation on adage 335 *asinus auriculas movens* or the ass moving its

21 "Id est: immissuras, id enim sonat vox Graeca, significat autem tessellas, ex quibus pingunt in opere museaco, aut quibus variant pavimenta. Hispani ex ligno similia conficiunt in mensis praecipue. Dicuntur autem emblemata παρά τὸ ἐμβάλλειν, id est: ab injiciendo" LB 4:409D.

22 "Quod si qui paulo sunt ambitiosiores, arrideant tamen et applaudant, atque asini exemplo τὰ ὦτα κινῶσι, quo caeteris probe intelligere videantur. Καὶ ταῦτα δὴ μὲν ταῦτα" ASD IV-3:76.

ears as if it understood what was said. This auto-citation reminds us that the *Adages* were perhaps the most extensive verbal mosaic of their era, utilizing all the resources of Renaissance typography and erudition to mix Latin and Greek prose and verse in the same text.

Erasmus' use of the figure of mosaic did not pass unnoticed among his peers. In an epistolary exchange from 1516, five years after the first edition of the *Praise of Folly*, the preeminent French humanist Guillaume Budé appeals to the figure of the mosaic in order to defend himself against what he considers to be hypocritical criticism on the part of Erasmus. In a letter of October 1516, Erasmus praises Budé's heterogeneous encyclopedia *De asse et partibus eius* (first published in 1508) but worries that some uncharitable critic might wonder what all the digressions have to do with the ostensible topic, the unit of Roman currency known as the *as*: "periculum fortassis est ne quis morosior ita secum cogitet: Praeclara quidem haec et splendida, sed... quid ista ad Assem?" (Allen 2:369). In his answer of November 1516, Budé demands to know why he should have less license to connect unrelated subjects than the author of the *Adages*, which were notorious for their heterogeneity (Allen 2:397). Yet he insists that all the philosophical digressions fit in with the main topic of his work in the same way that light blends with shadow in a painting: "Haec cum tractatu De Asse rebusque in eo proditis ita coherere censeo, ut lumina cum umbris in pictura, si modo decenter et apte ea quam vocant harmonien uti mihi contigit" (Allen 2:398). This is an interesting model of coherence based on an artistic technique that tends to draw the viewer closer to the painted surface in order to discern the different shades of light. Budé shifts his metaphoric ground in the following passage of his letter to Erasmus, when he offers another justification of his digressive tendency:

But one thing I do beg, that you do not count it against me if I have made longish digressions in one or two places, and have inserted like pieces of inlay [*velut emblemata*], in certain places where there were gaps, topics that would not have found such a suitable home in writings specially devoted to them.<sup>23</sup> CWE 4:146

Here he acknowledges having inserted some fairly long digressions in the open spaces of his work as if they were pieces of a mosaic, because they couldn't fit in his other works. In this instance, mosaic seems to be a kind of apologetic

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23 "Hoc tamen deprecor, ne mihi fraudi sit uno aut altero loco longiusculas digressiones fecisse, easque res velut emblemata locis quibusdam hiulcis inseruisse, quae sibi non perinde opportunum locum privatim dicatis operibus invenissent" Allen 2:398.

figure for the humanist miscellany, which should not be held to any strict standard of compositional unity. At the same time, Budé slyly returns the saying *velut emblemata* to Erasmus, as if to insinuate the complicity between his own mosaics and those of his critic and rival.

Erasmus' ironic treatment of the mosaic of speech finds another echo in a work by the French Renaissance poet Joachim Du Bellay. In the preface to his collection of neo-Latin epigrams entitled *Xenia seu nominum allusiones*, the poet insists that if he inserts Greek and Hebrew words into his Latin verses, he does so not to emulate the notorious mosaic of speech in a vain display of erudition but only as his argument requires:

Nor indeed, as some fools are accustomed to do, did we insert Greek and Hebrew words, as if they were pieces of a mosaic, into our little verses, which are hard enough as it is, because we wanted to appear learned in Greek and Hebrew and, to coin a phrase, triglot, but rather because the argument itself required it.<sup>24</sup>

Although ostensibly disavowing the type of verbal ostentation satirized in the *Praise of Folly*, Du Bellay shows nearly as little restraint as Folly herself in indulging a taste for Hellenisms as we can see here from his substitution of the Greek neologism *triglottoi* for the Latin *trilingues*. The idea of a trilingual text, rather than the bilingual texts elsewhere designated as mosaics, endorses the humanist ideal of instruction in Latin, Greek and Hebrew and recalls Erasmus' use of the epithet *bilingues* to distinguish the bilingual scholastics from trilingual humanists. In a letter of 1518 addressed to Antoon van Bergen (ep. 761), Erasmus applies this epithet to the Louvain theologians, whom he compares to a bunch of old parrots.<sup>25</sup> The opposition between bilingualism and trilingualism is further developed in the *Dialogus bilinguium ac trilinguium* of 1519 where bilingualism denotes duplicity or hypocrisy as well as ignorance of Hebrew and opposition to the humanist program of education implemented at the

24 "Neque vero (quod inepti quidam solent) Graecas et Hebraicas voces, ceu quaedam vermiculati operis emblemata, versiculis ideo nostris inseruimus, alioqui satis per se duris, quod Graece et Hebraice docti, atque (ut sic dicam) τριγλωττοι videri cuperemus, sed quod ita argumenti ipsius ratio postulare." Joachim Du Bellay, *Oeuvres poétiques VIII: autres œuvres latines*, ed. Geneviève Demerson (Paris, 1985) 61.

25 "Instituitur hic collegium trilingue ex legato Buslidii. Sed obstrepunt nonnulli qui, quod sunt, bilingues esse malunt; iam vetuli psitaci, quibus mutandae linguae spes non sit" Allen 3:200.

Collegium Trilingue of Louvain endowed by Jérôme de Busleyden.<sup>26</sup> Thus the *Xenia* preserves the Erasmian spirit by composing a trilingual mosaic, even if the Hebrew terms are all transliterated into the Latin alphabet.

One of Du Bellay's epigrams in particular seems to follow an Erasmian precedent in its play on the name of the poet's friend and protector Jean Morel, who had studied with Erasmus at Basel. Epigram 37 dedicated to "Ianus Morellus Grynaeus" includes the distich: "Μωρία Morello quod nulla sit, hinc quoque falsum / Morelli nomen, Iane, tibi impositum est" (Du Bellay 87).<sup>27</sup> This allusion to Folly or Moria is the same which Erasmus makes in the title of his *Encomium Moriae*, dedicated to Thomas More. Such *allusiones* remind us of the ludic dimension of the mosaic of speech, largely ignored by the classical rhetorical tradition.

Having satirically eulogized archaism and bilingualism in the *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus seems to endorse the same practices in the rhetorical treatise *De copia*, where he reviews a series of devices for achieving verbal abundance. Chapter 11 of the first book offers a method for lexical variety through synonyms, which are grouped under such headings as "verba sordida, inusitata, poetica, prisca, obsoleta, dura, peregrina, obscoena, et novata." Reviled in the *Encomium Moriae*, "prisca verba" now receive a cautious endorsement: "Prisca gratiam addunt, si modice et apte velut emblemata intertexantur" (ASD I-6:44).<sup>28</sup> Here, archaic expressions are compared to pieces of a mosaic, which becomes an unexpected figure for the moderate and appropriate use of verbal ornamentation. While tolerating "verba prisca," Erasmus rejects "obsoleta" which have fallen into complete disuse and oblivion. Under the heading of "verba novata," he allows the mixture of Greek and Latin "in loco" (ASD I-6:50) or where appropriate, a qualification intended perhaps to distinguish his advice from Folly's reference to orators who insert Greek words into Latin speeches "etiam si nunc non erat his locus" (ASD IV-3:76). The mixture of Greek and Latin is particularly recommended for epistolary composition, which profits from a certain erudite obscurity, as Erasmus knew from his quattrocento models and as he reiterates in *De copia*: "recte Graeca Latinis intertexentur, praesertim quum

26 Erasmus, *Dialogus bilinguium ac trilinguium in Erasmi opuscula*, ed. Wallace Ferguson (The Hague, 1933) 206–224. For an insightful analysis of the *Dialogus*, see André Godin, "Conflits de savoir, conflits de pouvoir. Erasme dans la querelle des langues" in *Les Réformes, enracinement socio-culturel* (Paris, 1985) 197–207.

27 "As there is no folly in Morel, here again the name of Morel was imposed on you by antiphrasis, Jean."

28 "Archaic words add charm if they are incorporated in small quantities and in appropriate places like inlaid decorations" CWE 24:312.

ad eruditos scribimus" (ASD I-6:50).<sup>29</sup> The exemption granted to "eruditi" or humanists from the ordinary prohibition of unusual diction may well be the principal thesis of this entire section of *De copia*. For at the outset of the chapter, under the heading "inusitata," Erasmus opposes erudition to usage as arbiters of style and diction:

At one time common usage had a great deal of authority. . . . But nowadays we acquire our way of speaking not from the community at large but from the writings of learned men, so usage does not have the same prescriptive power.<sup>30</sup> CWE 24:309–310

Erudition has supplanted usage as the main criterion of *recte dicere*. It is this erudition, or wide familiarity with classical literature, which authorizes those forms of obscurity or innovation most often associated with the mosaic of speech.

Erasmus develops the issue of learned usage more extensively in his treatise on letter writing *De Conscribendis epistolis*. It is interesting that Erasmus raises this issue in the context of clarity or *perspicuitas*, since all of the verbal liberties allowed to erudition tend in some degree to compromise clarity. His discussion of epistolary perspicuity, "de perspicuitate epistolae" (ASD I-2:217), follows the *Institutio oratoria* 1.6 where Quintilian reviews the four bases of speech: "sermo constat ratione vetustate auctoritate consuetudine" (1.6.1). On the subject of *vetustas*, Quintilian acknowledges that words retrieved from antiquity can enhance style, provided that they do not diminish clarity, which is the highest quality of speech.<sup>31</sup> Erasmus challenges the value of *perspicuitas* as it applies to the epistolary genre, which he regards as the most tolerant of obscurity especially between learned correspondents. He is willing to admit the wisdom of Augustus' advice to avoid an unusual word in speech like a rock at sea, and he agrees that the florid and archaic style of Apuleianism deserves

29 "We are justified in mixing Greek with Latin, especially when writing for the educated public" CWE 24:318. For the influence of Poliziano and Barbaro on Erasmian epistolography, see chapter two above and note 1 to Felix Heinimann's article.

30 "Olim plurimum ius erat consuetudini publicae. . . . Nunc quoniam loquendi ratio non a vulgo sed ex eruditorum monumentis petitur, non est eadem consuetudinis autoritas." ASD I-6:42.

31 "Verba a vetustate repetita non solum magnos adsertores habent, sed etiam adferunt orationi maiestatem aliquam non sine delectatione. . . . Sed opus est modo, ut neque crebra sint haec nec manifesta, quia nihil est odiosius adfectione. . . . oratio vero, cuius summa virtus est perspicuitas, quam sit vitiosa si egeat interprete!" *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.39–41.



ridicule (ASD 1-2:218). He insists, however, that the crucial question is what we mean by usage or “verba usitata”: “Arridet usitatis verbis contexta oratio, sed ab istis lubens quaesierim, quae tandem appellent usitata” (ASD 1-2:218).<sup>32</sup> In this respect he follows Quintilian, who recognized the importance of determining “quid sit quod consuetudinem vocemus” (1.6.43; what we mean by usage). Erasmus’ purpose seems to be to relativize the notion of usage so that it no longer serves as an absolute criterion of correct speech. He maintains that no word can be regarded as “inusitatum” which occurs in the works of approved authors. The ideal to which he aspires is “erudita perspicuitas” or elite clarity. We should be clear, but only to initiates: “Danda est opera ut simus aperti, sed eruditis” (ASD 1-2:219). In conclusion, he repeats that the epistolary genre is the most tolerant of obscurity, which can take such forms as borrowing from the Greek, allusions, amphibologies, proverbs, riddles, and other departures from common usage (ASD 1-2:221). In effect, humanism has its own usage which authorizes otherwise unusual or rare diction and sundry forms of verbal display. It is this element of ostentation and display which informs the analogy between speech and the visual art of mosaic.

While in the foregoing examples the mosaic of speech referred exclusively to various qualities or defects of Latin style, the same figure can apply to works of vernacular literature which make a conspicuous use of borrowed diction. The profusion of Greek and Latin quotations in vernacular erudition sustains the awkward esthetic of the mosaic throughout the Renaissance and well beyond. Even works of imaginative fiction import this technique with varying degrees of success and self-consciousness. We will look at two examples from Renaissance fiction, François Rabelais’ *Pantagruel* and Francesco Colonna’s *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, not in chronological order but rather in order of increasing extravagance and opacity of style. In *Pantagruel*, first published in 1532, Rabelais experiments with a wide range of styles and languages which make his work a treasury of aberrant and imaginary speech.<sup>33</sup> One of his most memorable speakers is the Ecolier Limousin, a student travelling from Paris to Limoges, whom Pantagruel encounters outside the gates of Orléans. When prompted to identify himself and to describe his student routine, the Ecolier deploys all the resources of “la redundance latinicome” in order to declaim such phrases as:

32 “Speech made up of familiar words has a unique charm, but I should like to ask the proponents of this idea what words they consider ‘familiar’” CWE 25:16.

33 For an inspired analysis of Rabelais’ verbal experimentation, see François Rigolot, *Les langages de Rabelais* (Geneva, 1972).

Nous transfretons la Sequane au dilucule et crepuscule, nous deambulons par les compites et quadriviers de l'urbe, nous despumons la verbocination Latiale et comme verisimiles amorabonds captons la benevolence de l'omnijuge omniforme et omnigene sexe feminin.<sup>34</sup>

Like the foolish orators who intersperse a Latin text with Greek words, the Ecolier Limousin inserts Latinate vocabulary into vernacular syntax in order to create an unnatural, hybrid style of speech. As a result, his words acquire a kind of materiality or opacity, as if they were little pieces of mosaic or visible forms like the "paroles gelées" of the *Quart Livre*. Moreover, by inserting Latin into French, the Ecolier also embeds the past in the present. He combines archaism with bilingualism to achieve a copiously foolish style.

While the poor Ecolier thus comes off as the butt of the joke, another disciple of Folly, he does allow Rabelais to rehearse some of the serious issues raised by Erasmus in the *De copia* and *De conscribendis epistolis*. For the encounter between Pantagruel and the Ecolier turns on the question of usage or *consuetudo*.<sup>35</sup> When Pantagruel first meets the Ecolier, he takes him for a devil, but one of his anonymous attendants assures the Giant that his interlocutor is only an arrogant student: "et luy semble bien qu'il est quelque grand orateur en François: par ce qu'il dedaigne l'usance commun de parler" (234). His vice is his disdain for common usage. When the Ecolier is forced by threats of violence to renounce all *verba inusitata* in favor of his native dialect, Pantagruel congratulates him in provocative terms: "A ceste heure parle tu naturellement" (234). It is not immediately clear whether the natural language of the Ecolier refers to his Limousin dialect or to the fact that he has just soiled his pants in fear of being strangled by the Giant. In any event, the plurality of languages deployed in this brief episode seems to relativize any notion of a unique natural language.<sup>36</sup> Finally, from this comic interlude the narrator wants to draw the moral that we should all conform to common usage: "qu'il nous convient parler selon le langaige usité. Et comme disoit Octavian Auguste qu'il faut eviter les motz espaves en pareille diligence que les patrons des navires evitent les rochiers de mer" (235). This is the same apophthegm or sentence which Erasmus cited approvingly in his *De conscribendis epistolis*: "non aliter in

34 Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Mireille Huchon (Paris, 1994) 232–233.

35 See Eric MacPhail, "The Elegance of the Ecolier Limousin: The European Context of Rabelais' Linguistic Parody," *MLN* 123 (2008) 873–894.

36 For a sensitive discussion of this question, see André Gendre, "'A ceste heure parle-tu naturellement'. Réflexions sur le langage naturel chez Rabelais," *Etudes Rabelaisiennes* 31 (1996) 49–63.

sermone fugiendum verbum insolens, quam in cursu scopulum" (ASD I-2:218).<sup>37</sup> However, Erasmus was quick to acknowledge the claims of erudition against the tyranny of custom and to rehabilitate the *verbum insolens* in the humanist repertory. If Rabelais remains true to the Erasmian spirit that everywhere animates his work, we cannot take his narrator's conclusions at face value. Certainly, few authors have created their work so completely at variance with common usage as Rabelais.

The same tendency toward outlandish diction can be seen on a much larger scale in one of the most unusual and attractive books ever made, Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, published in Venice by Aldo Manuzio in 1499. Colonna manages to sustain for an entire folio volume the sort of verbal affectation which Rabelais parodies for one episode.<sup>38</sup> Whereas Rabelais' Ecolier uses Latin words with French endings arranged in customary French word order, Colonna deploys his extravagantly Latinate vocabulary in a pompous periodic style which further alienates his text from vernacular usage. In addition, his predilection for Apuleius makes him one of the leading representatives of the archaizers or "obsoletae antiquitatis affectatores" derided by Erasmus in the *De conscribendis epistolis* (ASD I-2:218).<sup>39</sup> Colonna revels in the sort of laborious phrasing or "minuta constructio" that Cicero identified as the characteristic flaw of the mosaic of speech. At the same time, he delights in adorning his text with words and phrases from different languages and different writing systems including Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and pseudo-Egyptian hieroglyphs. As a consequence, we might say that the *Hypnerotomachia* is a book about words and what they look like on the printed page. It is perhaps no coincidence that Colonna is fascinated by mosaics, such as those which

37 There is a dual source to Rabelais' anecdote. The narrator of the *Pantagruel* refers us to "ce que dit le philosophe et Aule Gelle" referring to *Noctes Atticae* 1.10.4, where Aulus Gellius attributes the saying to Julius Caesar. Erasmus changes the attribution to Augustus in his epistolary treatise and in book four of his *Apophthegmata*: "Augustus contra verbum insolens quasi scopulum fugiendum esse dicebat" (ASD IV-4:321). Rabelais first assigned the saying to "César" in 1532 before revising his text to read "Octavian Auguste." For further details, see Eric MacPhail, "From Caesar to Augustus: A Note on Rabelais' Revisions to *Pantagruel*," *Etudes Rabelaisiennes* 44 (2006) 7–11.

38 For a linguistic comparison of Colonna and Rabelais, see Mireille Huchon, "Rabelais et le vulgaire illustre" in *La langue de Rabelais. La langue de Montaigne*, ed. Franco Giaccone (Geneva, 2009) 19–22.

39 For an excellent treatment of the archaic tendency in Renaissance prose, see John D'Amico, "The Progress of Renaissance Latin Prose: The Case of Apuleianism," *Renaissance Quarterly* 37 (1984) 351–92. Giovanni Pozzi has documented Colonna's lexical debt to Apuleius in *Francesco Colonna Biografia e opere*, vol. 2 *Opere* (Padua, 1959) 81–86.

he describes in the temple of Venus Physizoe, where his heroes are initiated into the mysteries of love and his readers into the mysteries of architecture. In order to describe his fictional mosaics, Colonna employs a sort of mosaic technique of incrusting or inlaying his text with fragments of foreign speech, as we can verify if we compare Colonna's description to the chapters on mosaic from Pliny's *Natural History*. Pliny said of the art of *pavimentum*:

Paved floors originated among the Greeks and were skillfully embellished like painting until superseded by *lithostrota*. The most famous artist in this genre was Sosus, who laid down the floor at Pergamum known in Greek as the unswept room, since he portrayed with small multi-colored cubes the leftovers from the dinner table as if they had been left there.<sup>40</sup>  
*NH* 36.184

Of *lithostroton*, or marble floor mosaic, he remarks, "Lithostrota coeptavere iam sub Sulla; parvulis certe crustis exstat hodieque quod in Fortunae delubro Praeneste fecit" (*NH* 36.189; they began already under Sulla; there still exists today one which he made from little pieces in the temple of Fortune at Palestrina). From these pieces, Colonna constructs his description of the mosaic pavement located under the vaulted roof of the temple:

Sotto el concamerato erano nel solistimo Asaroto di vermiculato emblemate, fogliamo, animali, et fiori tessellulati di minutissimi corpusculi, de recisamenti lapidei diligentemente tessellati depicto, et coaequatisimamente perfricati, o vero scalpturati. Quale arte non hebbe nel pavimentare Zenodoro in pergamo. Ne tale fue il lithostrato in praeneste nel delubro dilla fortuna.<sup>41</sup>

40 "Pavimenta originem apud Graecos habent, elaborata arte picturae ratione, donec lithostrota expulere eam. Celeberrimus fuit in hoc genere Sosus qui Pergami stravit quem vocant asaroton ocon, quoniam purgamenta cenae in pavimentis quaeque everri solent velut relictia fecerat parvis e tessellis tinctisque in varios colores."

41 Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, ed. Marco Ariani and Mino Gabriele, vol. 1 (Milan, 1998) 209. The editors translate this passage into recognizable Italian as follows: "Sotto la volta, sul pavimento musivo a emblemi tassellati, c'erano fogliami, animali e fiori fatti di tessere minutissime: le figure erano state ottenute con schegge di pietre diligentemente ridotte a tasselli levigati e lavorati fino a renderli tutti uguali, con un'arte ignota a Zenodoro quando pavimentò Pergamo, come a chi fece il pavimento nel tempio della Fortuna a Preneste" 2:222.

Apart from substituting the name of Zenodorus for Sosus, according to a variant reading in the manuscript tradition,<sup>42</sup> Colonna has simply transferred phrases from Pliny's work into his own text "velut emblemata," as if they were decorative materials to be lifted from one setting to another.

This practice resembles the use of the emblem, whose name is probably the most conspicuous instance of the metaphor of mosaic in Renaissance usage. Criticism has inquired deeply into the title of Andrea Alciati's *Emblematum liber*, and much of the speculation focuses on the prefatory or liminal material written either by the author or his translators and publishers for the early editions of his work.<sup>43</sup> The preface to the editions of the *Emblemata* published by Guillaume Rouillé in Lyon during the mid-sixteenth century offers an interesting explanation of Alciati's choice of title. According to this document, which is unsigned but most likely attributable to Rouillé himself,<sup>44</sup> an emblem book is a repertoire of images and inscriptions which the reader can transfer to his own domestic environment to make every surface eloquent and cheerful.<sup>45</sup> That is why they are called *emblemata*, which means mosaic according to a definition taken from Guillaume Budé: "Sunt enim Emblemata vermiculata opera ex tessellis insititiis apta et composita, interprete Budaëo."<sup>46</sup> In other words, emblems are not merely to be admired in a book, but are also to be inscribed on property in much the same way that pieces of a mosaic are inserted into a wall or pavement. So the mosaic is a figure for decorative art that can be transferred easily from one context to another because it doesn't belong to any. It is perfectly detachable and impersonal. This is the logic that underlies Francesco Colonna's use of classical models as decorative materials that can be transferred to his own text with little or no modification. Like the consumer of emblems, the author of the *Hypnerotomachia* uses fragments of

42 This variant, though unacknowledged in the critical apparatus of the Teubner edition of Karl Mayhoff, was remarked on by Ermolao Barbaro in his *Castigationes Plinianaë*, ed. Giovanni Pozzi, vol. 3 (Padua, 1979) 1173: "Vetus lectio: 'celeberrimus in hoc genere Sosus'. Romani codices Zenodorus, non Sosus, omninoque artificis eius nomen est qui Pergami stravit pavimentum id quod vocant 'asaroton oëcon': ita enim lego, non 'eusarroton'."

43 See especially Hessel Miedema, "The Term *Emblema* in Alciati," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 31 (1968) 234–50.

44 According to Claudie Balavoine, "Le classement thématique des emblèmes d'Alciati: recherche en paternité" in *The Emblem in Renaissance and Baroque Europe*, eds. A. Adams and A.J. Harper (Leiden, 1992) 1–21.

45 Andrea Alciati, *Emblemata* (Lyon, 1550) 4–5.

46 Alciati 5. Budé provides the following definition in his *Annotationes in Pandectas* (Paris, 1508) fol. 85 v<sup>o</sup>: "Emblema vermiculatum opus significat ex tessellis insititiis aptum atque consertum."

the past without adapting them to the present, because for him they are ornaments rather than historically conditioned ideas.

This practice contrasts sharply with the more familiar Renaissance ideal of the assimilation of classical models, which can be exemplified by a wide variety of Latin and vernacular texts from Petrarch to Montaigne.<sup>47</sup> Within this long tradition of imitation theory, one text which stands out for its polemical use of the mosaic metaphor is Erasmus' *Dialogus Ciceronianus*. As we have seen, the author's spokesman Bulephorus uses the figure of mosaic to criticize Ciceronianism, or the exclusive, anachronistic imitation of Cicero, as a kind of camouflaged paganism. When pressed by his interlocutor Nosoponus whether, in defiance of the principles of rhetoric, he would condemn all imitation, Bulephorus returns to the figure of mosaic in order to articulate his own idea of imitation, which is to appropriate and digest the material we borrow from a broad range of authors so as to express our own true nature. In this way, Bulephorus assures Nosoponus, "your reader will see it not as a piece of decoration filched from Cicero, but a child sprung from your own brain, the living image of its father" (CWE 28:441).<sup>48</sup> "Your speech will not be a patchwork or a mosaic," he continues, "but a lifelike portrait of the person you really are, a river welling out from your inmost being" (CWE 28:442).<sup>49</sup> The qualities which Erasmus associates with successful imitation, namely vitality, fluency, and inspiration, stand opposed to the figure of the mosaic, which represents dead or inert speech. In particular, the expression "emblema Ciceroni detractum" suggests that humanist oratory is a sort of pavement or inert surface decorated with classical designs. It is the very antithesis of the river flowing from the source, "amnis e fonte promanans," whose attributes of fluidity and abundance now seem to defy the ambitions of Renaissance eloquence. This use of the mosaic could be taken as a far reaching indictment of humanist practice, which recognizes but does not always admire its own image in the figure of mosaic. Yet the very inconsistency of Erasmus' usage, which salutes the rich mosaic of Plutarch's *Moralia* (ASD IV-2:264) while condemning the paved eloquence of Ciceronianism, resists any definitive conclusions.

47 For the importance of assimilation in classical and Renaissance imitation theory, see Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy* (New Haven, 1982).

48 "ut qui legit non agnoscat emblema Ciceroni detractum, sed foetum e tuo natum cerebro, quemadmodum Palladem aiunt e cerebro Iovis, vivam parentis imaginem referentem" ASD I-2:704.

49 "nec oratio tua cento quispiam videatur aut opus Musaicum, sed spirans imago tui pectoris, aut amnis e fonte cordis tui promanans."

Another point of interest here is how Erasmus treats the metaphor of the portrait or *imago* which he borrows, along with the metaphor of digestion, from Seneca's *Epistulae morales*. In letter 84, Seneca admonishes Lucilius that if he is to resemble another he should do so as a son and not as a portrait: "similem esse to volo quomodo filium non quomodo imaginem: imago res mortua est" (*Epistulae* 84.8). Erasmus transforms Seneca's "res mortua" into a "viva imago" and even a "spirans imago," which he opposes to the "opus Musaicum" as a lively to a lifeless art form. The term *imago* has a deeply spiritual meaning in Erasmus' writings and is usually associated with the figure of Christ. At the end of the *Paraclesis* or preface to his edition of the New Testament, Erasmus asks why, rather than worship the inanimate vestiges or relics of Christ, we should not sooner worship his living, breathing image in the Gospels: "At cur non potius vivam illius et spirantem imaginem in hisce veneramur libris?"<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere, the notion of the *imago* supports an evangelical theory of truth. Christ is called the Word of God, Erasmus explains in his last work, *Ecclesiastes*, because the Son resembles the Father in the same way that true speech resembles the mind of the speaker. This relationship is expressed as an *imago*:

Mens fons est, sermo imago a fonte promanans. Quemadmodum autem unicum illud Dei Verbum imago est Patris . . . ita humanae mentis imago quaedam est oratio.<sup>51</sup> ASD V-4:40.

Now we have a flowing image or "imago a fonte promanans," which echoes the "amnis e fonte promanans" of the earlier dialogue. Such verbal parallels suggest that these spiritual connotations are already present in the discussion of imitation at the end of the *Ciceronianus*, where Bulephorus expounds his theory of imitation in contradistinction to the mosaic of speech. For Christian humanism, the mosaic poses a threat to proper spirituality.

Like Erasmus at the beginning of the sixteenth century, so Michel de Montaigne at the end has recourse to the metaphor of mosaic in order to denounce the unassimilated or borrowed learning that was such a prominent defect of humanist culture. Montaigne expresses his concerns about literary borrowing in the essay "De l'institution des enfans" (1,26), where he strenuously disavows the sort of imitation associated with mosaic. He contrasts those who display their literary borrowings as if they would wear another man's armor

50 Erasmus, *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Hajo Holborn (Munich, 1933) 148.

51 "Mind is the source, speech the image proceeding from the source. Just as the unique Word of God is the image of the Father . . . so speech is a sort of image of the human mind."



to those, like himself, who hide their borrowings and appropriate them: “ceux qui les veulent cacher et faire propres” (I,26,148). In the Erasmian spirit, he disdains unassimilated borrowings as “nostre incrustation empruntée,” which recalls the mosaic technique of incrustation. Montaigne advocates instead self-expression through imitation: “Je ne dis les autres, sinon pour d'autant plus me dire” (148). According to this formulation, the numerous quotations with which he inlays his text form a portrait rather than a mosaic.

Montaigne returns to this topic in the essay “De la vanité” (III,9), where he deplores the treachery of his memory, which renders him inapt for public oratory. Of course, such inaptitude merely confirms the authenticity of his speech. Unable to rely on his memory, he is obliged to forgo artifice and premeditation in favor of spontaneous self-expression. As he has argued elsewhere (“Des menteurs” I,9), liars need a good memory. It is in this context that he makes the memorable claim that though he often adds to his work, he never corrects it: “J'adjouste, mais je ne corrige pas” (III,9,963). Presumably, correction would compromise his reputation for spontaneity. Immediately following this disclaimer of correction, Montaigne inserted into the Bordeaux copy of the *Essais* a paragraph explaining his policy of rewriting, and as criticism has observed, this explanation is itself so heavily emended and reworked as easily to belie the preceding disclaimer.<sup>52</sup> The paragraph begins with an affirmation of unity:

Mon livre est tousjours un. Sauf qu'à mesure qu'on se met à le renouvel-  
ler, afin que l'acheteur ne s'en aille les mains du tout vuides, je me donne  
loy d'y attacher (comme ce n'est qu'une marqueterie mal jointe), quelque  
emblème supernuméraire. III,9,964

According to this passage, for each new edition of the *Essais*, the author feels obliged to add new material, which he describes as “quelque emblème supernuméraire.” If Montaigne's additions are emblems, then his essays are mosaics; but not in the traditional sense identified above, of carefully constructed compositions. For in parentheses, he dismisses his work as “une marqueterie mal jointe” or a disjointed marquetry. This is a particularly provocative metaphor because the whole point of marquetry, which is a sort of mosaic in wood, is to join pieces together artfully. Montaigne's phrase implies indifference to the meticulous arrangement of words in a clause or period which, in the rhetorical tradition, is associated with the mosaic of speech. He has thus inverted Lucilius' figure so as to convey a casual disdain for artifice. At the same time, through his metaphor of the “marqueterie mal jointe,” he acknowledges that

52 See George Hoffmann, *Montaigne's Career* (Oxford, 1998) 109.

certain elements of the text stand out in isolation instead of blending into a unified whole.<sup>53</sup> Through this ingenious oxymoron, the mosaic becomes a figure of anti-rhetoric and of the refusal of artistic composition.

It may be objected that Montaigne's marquetry is hardly a synonym for mosaic, but the terms were and remain closely associated both as metaphors for a whole composed of disparate parts and as art forms in which pieces of building material, whether wood or stone, are inlaid in a surface to form a decorative design. Marquetry is the equivalent of the Italian *tarsia*, which Giorgio Vasari defines as a mosaic in wood in a chapter heading from the introduction to the *Vite*: "Del musaico di legname cioè delle tarsie."<sup>54</sup> Similarly, in his gloss on Erasmus' use of *emblemata* in a passage from the *Praise of Folly* quoted above, Listrius associates mosaic (*opus museacum*) with marquetry, which he attributes for some reason to the Spanish: "Hispani ex ligno similia conficiunt in mensis praecipue" (LB 4:409D). Moreover, Barthélemy Aneau, in the preface to his French translation of Alciati's *Emblematum liber*, conflates mosaic and marquetry in his definition of emblems: "EMBLEMES . . . sont ouvraiges bigarrés de petites pieces de marcqueterie."<sup>55</sup> This translates the Latin phrase from Rouillé's preface: "sunt enim Emblemata vermiculata opera ex tessellis insititiis apta et composita." Aneau's definition testifies to the inextricable confusion of mosaic and marquetry in Renaissance usage. Finally, Geoffroy Tory conflates the two techniques in a composite form which he calls "ouvrage de Marquetis et de Mosaique" and which he intends as a figure of harmonious composition. To account for his decision to group the twenty three "Attic" letters by analogy rather than listing them in alphabetical order, Tory explains that the nine Muses, the seven Liberal Arts, the four Virtues, and the three Graces are all related to each other and to the twenty three letters in the same way that the disparate pieces of a mosaic join together to form a perfect whole.<sup>56</sup> Here mosaic reveals an ordinarily submerged association with harmony and beauty.

Having surveyed the mosaic of speech from Lucilius to Montaigne, we could offer, in conclusion, to reassemble the pieces of this tradition into a coherent image of Renaissance esthetics. However, the metaphor of mosaic does more to complicate than to clarify our picture of Renaissance esthetic values. For

53 For a different interpretation of Montaigne's metaphor, and a useful corrective of my own reading, see Francis Goyet, "Les *Essais* entre marqueterie 'mal jointe' et nid 'bien joint,'" *Montaigne Studies* 26 (2014) 37–54.

54 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, eds. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi, vol. 1 (Florence, 1966) 155.

55 Cited in Balavoine (as in note 44 above) 3.

56 Tory, *Champfleury* (Paris, 1998) fol. 23 r<sup>o</sup>.

all its competing connotations, the mosaic generally conveys the challenge of transferring detachable pieces of classical wisdom and eloquence to modern contexts. The pieces of the past resist integration in the present. In this respect, the vaunted durability of mosaic reveals its inherent flaw.<sup>57</sup> Mosaic stones are obdurate: they persist but they don't adapt. They are too rigid to circulate. The mosaic of speech is a potent counterexample in an esthetic that prizes mobility and fluency.

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57 Vasari testifies to the durability of mosaic in chapter 29 of his "Introduzione alle tre arti del disegno": "E certo è che il mosaico è la più durabile pittura che sia, imperò che l'altra col tempo si spegne e questa nello stare fatta di continuo s'accende, et inoltre la pittura manca e si consuma per se medesima, ove il mosaico per la sua lunghissima vita si può quasi chiamare eterno" (*Le vite* 148).

## The Universal Library

In letter 33 of his *Moral Epistles*, Seneca wonders why Lucilius keeps asking him to write down more famous quotations from the Stoic sages. The burden of his letter is a lesson in autonomy addressed to someone who never speaks for himself: don't just collect other people's words, Seneca advises his correspondent, make them your own. Seneca declines to furnish additional quotations from the Stoics because he feels that the florilegium approach is unworthy either of the Stoics or of the mature student of philosophy. How can you pick out the best sayings of the Stoics when every word they speak is true? If you want quotations, read Epicurus, whose best lines are the more remarkable for their rarity. Besides, all the Stoics are equal, so who should get credit for their sayings? *Non sumus sub rege: sibi quisque se vindicat* (33.4). The florilegium is fine for teaching children to memorize famous sayings, but adults should not rely on such means for knowledge: "turpe est enim seni aut prospicienti senectutem ex commentario sapere" (33.7). At this point in the letter we should realize that Seneca's hostility to quotations is a fertile source of quotations and a key to his sententious style. Why tell us what others say, he dictates to Lucilius, if you have nothing to say for yourself: "Hoc Zenon dixit: tu quid? Hoc Cleanthes: tu quid?" (33.7). Put a little distance between yourself and your book, Seneca declares; finding is not the same thing as following: "Praeterea qui alium sequitur nihil invenit, immo nec quaerit" (33.10). When Montaigne found this phase, he could not resist following it in his essay on education: "Qui suit un autre, il ne suit rien. Il ne trouve rien, voire il ne cherche rien" (1,26,151). If we are too deferential to the past, Seneca reminds us, we will never make progress. Besides, the ancients have no monopoly on the truth: "patet omnibus veritas" (33.11). In short, why quote the Stoics, when you can quote Seneca?

Montaigne certainly gets the gist of Seneca's advice in his own highly quotable essay on pedagogy "Du pédantisme" (1,25). Challenging the authority of the ancients in modern education, Montaigne wonders why we cannot speak for ourselves: "Nous sçavons dire: Cicero dit ainsi; voilà les meurs de Platon; ce sont les mots mesmes d'Aristote" (1,25,137).<sup>1</sup> Here, Cicero, Plato, and Aristotle replace Zeno and Cleanthes from Seneca's letter. "Mais nous, que disons nous nous mesmes? que jugeons nous? que faisons nous? Autant en diroit bien un

1 All quotations of Montaigne are taken from Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. Pierre Villey and V.L. Saulnier (Paris, 1978). The *Essais* are cited by book, chapter, page.

perroquet" (I,25,137). Echoing the force of Seneca's "tu quid," the insistent repetition of *nous* in Montaigne's phrase parodies the impulse to repeat, to cite, while indulging the same impulse. The parroting of ancient authors reminds the essayist of the rich Roman who hired a retinue of scholars to provide him with quotations in verse and prose to adorn his conversation.

Cette façon me fait souvenir de ce riche Romain, qui avoit esté soigneux, à fort grande despence, de recouvrer des hommes suffisans en tout genre de sciences, qu'il tenoit continuellement autour de luy, affin que, quand il escherroit entre ses amis quelque occasion de parler d'une chose ou d'autre, ils supplissent sa place, et fussent tous prêts à luy fournir, qui d'un discours, qui d'un vers d'Homere, chacun selon son gibier; et pensoit ce sçavoir estre sien par ce qu'il estoit en la teste de ses gens. I,25,137

The wealthy Roman, whose name escapes Montaigne, is Calvisius Sabinus from Seneca's letter 27. The story of Sabinus is a commonplace that Seneca invented rather than inherited, and that he bequeathed to subsequent authors including Petrarch, Erasmus, and Montaigne.<sup>2</sup> Seneca introduces this story as a parable of memory, or the failure of memory. Sabinus couldn't even remember the names of Achilles, Ulysses, or Priam, and so he hired servants to quote Homer and Hesiod for him, thinking that he knew whatever his servants knew. When he reveals the extravagant cost of his hired memory, his guest Satellius Quadratus tells him he could have bought as many book cases for less: "minoris inquit totidem scrinia emissas" (27.7). Presumably, Sabinus would do better to get his own copy of Homer and Hesiod rather than rely on the erudition of his servants. Then Satellius tells him he ought to take up wrestling, and when Sabinus protests that he is too frail, Satellius, who must have finished his free meal by this time, asks, "don't you see how many healthy servants you have?" The whole farce is supposed to convey the futility of wealth, "bona mens nec commodatur nec emitur" (27.8), and to illustrate Epicurus' famous saying, "Divitiae sunt ad legem naturae composita paupertas" (27.9) or poverty in accord with nature's law is wealth. Seneca, who scorns quotations, figures that this saying is worth quoting over and over. His own endorsement of quotation

2 The name Calvisius Sabinus is well attested outside Seneca's *oeuvre*, and some, beginning with Justus Lipsius, have identified Seneca's *dives* with a consul of that name during the reign of Tiberius, who was the grandson of Julius Caesar's lieutenant Calvisius Sabinus. See A. Vassileiou, "Le riche Calvisius Sabinus (Sénèque, Ep. 27, 5–8)," *L'Antiquité Classique* 43 (1974) 241–257. Seneca did not invent the name, but he did initiate the topos of Sabinus and hired memory.

is worth quoting for its epigrammatic style: “numquam nimis dicitur quod numquam satis discitur” (you can never repeat too often what is never sufficiently learned).<sup>3</sup> By the same token, you can’t teach what you must repeat.

On its way from Seneca to Montaigne, the Sabinus topos underwent some interesting inflections, many of them suggested by the detail of the *scrinia* or book cases. Petrarch remembers Sabinus in a chapter from the first book of his ethical treatise *De remediis utriusque fortunae*. Chapter 43 entitled *De librorum copia* explores the perils of owning many books, and like the other chapters, it stages a dialogue between the fatuously self-satisfied *gaudium* and the perpetually dissatisfied *ratio*. *Gaudium*’s role is a late-medieval anticipation of the sort of variation exercises that Erasmus teaches in the *De copia*, consisting of twelve slightly different versions of the boast, “I have lots of books.” *Ratio* is unimpressed either by *Gaudium*’s wealth of books or by his poverty of expression, and he strives, like a skeptic or perhaps a sophist, to find the *antilogos* to *Gaudium*’s pride of ownership. At one point Reason reminds his interlocutor of the dubious reputation enjoyed by the Library of Alexandria founded by Ptolemy Philadelphus, admired by Livy, disapproved by Seneca, and which, from the rational point of view, may be “excused” by royal wealth but would presumably be inexcusable in one of lower rank, such as a mere personification like *Gaudium*.<sup>4</sup> To another iteration of “I have lots of books,” Reason answers “What if your mind is too narrow? Don’t you remember Sabinus in Seneca, who boasted of his servants’ knowledge? What’s the difference between you, if not that you are even dumber than him? Both of you boast of *alieno ingenio*, Sabinus of his servants’ *ingenium* and you of your books’ ” (Rawski 38).<sup>5</sup> Petrarch compares Sabinus’ reliance on hired knowledge

3 Robert Burton repeats this quotation incorrectly in the preface to the *Anatomy of Melancholy*: “nunquam nimis dicitur, quod nunquam satis discitur” (19). Seneca spoke as the teacher and Burton as the student who never learned.

4 “Maior ne tibi quam Ptolomaeo Philadelpho Regi Aegypti, quem Alexandrinae bibliothecae quadraginta librorum milia coacervasse compertum est, qui tamen diversis ex locis, diu magno studio quaesiti, simul omnes arserunt? Quod elegantiae regum curaeque opus egregium fuisse, ait Livius, quem Seneca reprehendit, non id elegantiae curaeque regiae opus dicens, sed studiosae luxuriae, immo ne id quidem, sed se ipsam conquistis spectaculis inaniter ostentantis. Et Livii tamen dictum et Ptolomaei factum, utrumque forsitan regiae opes excusent.” *Petrarch: Four Dialogues for Scholars*, ed. Conrad Rawski (Cleveland, 1967) 32. For a discussion of this and other uses of the “Ptolemaic topos,” see Jon Thiem, “Humanism and Bibliomania: Transfigurations of King Ptolemy and his Library in Renaissance Literature” *Res Publica Litterarum* 5,2 (1982) 227–46.

5 “Quid si capax animus non est? Meministi Sabinum illum apud Senecam, servorum suorum scientia glorientem? Quid inter te atque illum interest, nisi quod aliquanto tu stultior?

to the book collector's pride in his books: both terms of the comparison represent a form of alienation, an inability to appropriate that which is *alienum*. Montaigne will be eager to appropriate this idea in his own essays. Moreover, the analogy that Petrarch draws between books and servants works against the distinction made by Satellius in Seneca's letter where *scrinia* are opposed to *servos*. Neither seems to be a true possession for Petrarch speaking through his persona of *Ratio*.

Angelo Decembrio may be seen to respond to Petrarch's treatment of book collecting in his mid-fifteenth-century dialogue *De politia litteraria*. In the second book of the dialogue, which stages a conversation at the court of Leonello d'Este Duke of Ferrara, Giovanni Gualengo pronounces an encomium of literary culture and a vituperation of those who neglect such culture and bring discredit to the moderns. Described by the narrator as "second to none" in wealth, birth, and possessions, Gualengo congratulates himself on his library, which, if it cannot match the Duke's own "*librorum copia*," at least is filled with many useful books, including Seneca's *Epistulae morales* as we learn later.<sup>6</sup> Developing Horace's theme of "*Exegi monumentum*," Gualengo insists that the literary work outlasts all other monuments and remains forever our own, in keeping with Pliny's advice, "*Effinge aliquid et excude, quod sit perpetuo tuum*" (195). In this way Decembrio returns to the distinction between "*tuum et alienum*" crucial to Seneca and Petrarch, and he seems to identify the book as an inalienable possession. The problem is that Gualengo speaks as a book collector, not as an author, and his sentence, "What you write is always your own," is not his own but taken from Pliny the Younger's *Epistles* (1.3.4), as he readily acknowledges. Through this contradiction, Decembrio recuperates the crux of Seneca's paradoxical advice to Lucilius: speak for yourself and I'll tell you what to say. The commonplace tradition, represented here by Pliny's pithy phrase, reduces the ideal of autonomy or self-sufficiency to the status of a quotation, which can be shared equally and has no proprietor. Montaigne, for instance, in his essay on solitude (1,39), will cite Pliny's advice to cultivate fame through literary study, but he repudiates both the means and the end of this precept: "*Ny la fin donc, ny le moyen de ce conseil ne me contente*" (245). Montaigne refuses to make Pliny's saying his own, while Gualengo reveals through his citation how little he contributes of his own. Nevertheless, Decembrio's treatment of the book collector, who has a more active role and eloquent voice than either

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Uterque equidem alieno, verum ille servorum, et certe suorum, ac tu librorum, nil ad te pertinentium ingenio, gloriaris."

6 Angelo Camillo Decembrio, *De politia litteraria*, ed. Norbert Witten (Munich, 2002) 194.



*Gaudium* or Sabinus, is in some respect distinctive. His way to dramatize the dilemma of commonplace culture is his own.

Erasmus uncovers another unsettling implication of the Sabinus anecdote in a letter he wrote at the inception of his career to a young German student, Christian Northoff (ep. 56). The letter is a brief pedagogical treatise or *ratio studii* that was later incorporated in Erasmus' treatise on letter writing, *De conscribendis epistolis*. One of the most interesting features of this letter is the ambivalence that it expresses toward the written word as a pedagogical tool:

First of all, and this is the essential thing, listen to your teacher's explanations not only attentively but eagerly. . . . Remember everything he says and even write down his most important utterances, for writing is the most faithful custodian of words. On the other hand, avoid trusting it too much, like that absurd man of wealth in Seneca who had come to believe that he had preserved in his own memory everything that any of his servants remembered. Do not be guilty of possessing a library of learned books while lacking learning yourself.<sup>7</sup> CWE 1:115

Here Sabinus, unnamed, is identified with a naïve faith in writing as a sort of artificial memory. Letters may be the most faithful guardians of speech, “fidelissimae vocum custodes,” but they are still external to us, so that the unlearned man may have learned books, in the same way as the ignorant master may keep intelligent servants. The suspicion expressed toward writing in epistle 56 is developed further in the *De ratione studii*, in the conclusion to which Erasmus warns that writing can weaken the memory of young students. Rather than write down everything that their teacher says, the *adolescentes* should merely take a few notes and let their memory develop without relying on the prop of writing or “scripti adminiculum” (ASD 1-2:146). This warning may recall the myth of Theuth, the Egyptian god of writing, recounted by Socrates to Phaedrus at the end of Plato's dialogue. When Theuth boasts of having found a drug for memory: μνήμης τε γὰρ καὶ σοφίας φάρμακον ἡύρέθη (*Phaedrus* 274e6), Thamous warns him that his drug will induce people to neglect the authentic faculty of

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7 “Principio, quod caput est, praeceptorem interpretantem non attentus modo, sed et avidus auscultato. . . . Omnia illius dicta memoriae, praecipua etiam literis mandabis, fidelissimis vocum custodibus: quibus rursus ita confidas cave ut dives ille ridiculus apud Senecam, qui sic animum induxerat, ut se tenere crederet quicquid servorum quisquam meminisset. Noli committere ut codices eruditos habeas, ipse ineruditus” Allen 1:173.

memory through a misplaced faith in writing, διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς (275a3). Plato's *pharmakon* may be the distant ancestor of Erasmus' *adminiculum*, and his warning against faith in writing a basis for Erasmus' epistolary caveat: "literis ita confidas cave ut dives ille ridiculus apud Senecam" (Allen 1:173). Calvisius Sabinus, Petrarch's *Gaudium* and book collectors in general take their place in the line of descent from Theuth, the original saboteur of memory. Sabinus returns in the *Praise of Folly* as a figure of *philautia* and fortunate self-satisfaction: "ille bis beatus apud Senecam dives" (ASD IV-3:128). Perhaps laboring under the ill effects of writing, Folly misremembers Seneca's letter and says that Sabinus did not hesitate to enter into a wrestling match because he was confident in the strength of his servants.<sup>8</sup>

Montaigne recuperates the legacy of Plato, Seneca, Petrarch, and Erasmus in the essay "Du pedantisme," where he remembers the example but not the name of Calvisius Sabinus. As we have seen, it is the modern impulse to parrot the ancients that triggers this memory in the essayist.

Mais nous, que disons nous nous mesmes? que jugeons nous? que faisons nous? Autant en diroit bien un perroquet. Cette façon me fait souvenir de ce riche Romain . . . et pensoit ce sçavoir estre sien par ce qu'il estoit en la teste de ses gens; et comme font aussi ceux desquels la suffisance loge en leurs somptueuses librairies. 1,25,137

At the very end of this long sentence, here abbreviated, Montaigne draws an analogy between Sabinus, who in Seneca's account owned servants rather than books, and the rich book collectors of the Renaissance, who lodge their *suffisance* or their capacity, not in the inalienable faculty of judgment that Montaigne claims to cultivate in his essays, but rather in external possessions like books. Their library is now in tension with their native faculties: they have a good library rather than a good mind. It is interesting that Sabinus appears here as "ce riche Romain" just as Erasmus recalls him as "ille dives apud Senecam." Sabinus is forgotten while Seneca is remembered for making fun of Sabinus. The Sabinus topos seems to be related to anxiety about memory and oblivion as well as to the scholar's resentment of the monopoly of books held by the wealthy classes, which is expressed quite clearly in Petrarch's dialogue. The example of Sabinus is a commonplace, and yet it reflects poorly

8 "Qualis erat ille bis beatus apud Senecam dives, qui . . . non dubitaturus vel in pugilum certamen descendere, homo alioqui adeo imbecillus, ut vix viveret, hac re fretus quod multos haberet domi servos egregie robustos" ASD IV-3:128.

on commonplaces, which tend to lodge in libraries, or in compilations calling themselves libraries, rather than in our judgment or understanding. As a prime locus for the accumulation and dispersion of commonplaces, the library has an ambivalent reputation in Renaissance writing.

In effect, the library is the composite topos of Renaissance humanism: it is the *locus locorum* or repository of all the transient debris of classical culture. The library is an archive or storage place for famous sayings, proverbial gems, exemplary anecdotes, but it is also where people meet to cite, translate, adapt, and share these forms. Beyond its literal meanings, the library is a figure for the entire process of humanist learning and communication, and as such it stores up the ambitions and insecurities of an age. We shall see how the library conveys both a sense of loss and a sense of triumph through its association with a few pivotal commonplaces of the classical tradition.

The definition of the library that circulates most fluently in the Renaissance originates in an exercise in imperial chicanery. Book 32 of the Digest of Roman civil law, which was compiled and promulgated in the sixth century under Emperor Justinian, treats of inheritance law and the abusive interpretation of ambiguous legacies. If someone were to bequeath his library to his heir, what would that legacy comprise: the books, the shelves, the room? Roman imperial lawyers, including a jurist of the fatal name of Sabinus, offer differing views of this apparently straightforward legacy, thus advancing the cause of lexicography if not the cause of justice. The law *librorum appellatione* cites Nerva's view that the definition of *bibliotheca* depends on what the testator meant, for the word can designate either the place itself, *locum*, or the furniture, *armarium*, or the books, *libros*.<sup>9</sup> This is the definition retrieved for Renaissance humanism by Niccolò Perotti in his immense commentary on the Latin language entitled *Cornucopiae* and first published in 1489. In the guise of a commentary on the prefatory epistle of book one of Martial's epigrams, at the lemma *In libellis meis*, Perotti conducts a leisurely, rambling survey of all possible lexical permutations of *libellis*, including *liber*, *libertas*, *libido*, and, for good measure, *bibliotheca*.

From which we get the word "library" which, as Ulpian says, can mean either the place where the books are kept, as when we say, "he's in the library," or the book-case where the books are placed, whence we say, "he

9 "Et eleganter Nerva ait interesse id quod testator senserit: nam et locum significari bibliothecam eo: alias armarium, sicuti dicimus 'eboream bibliothecam emit': alias libros, sicuti dicimus 'bibliothecam emisse.'" *Digest* 32.52 or, in Renaissance fashion, *l. librorum appellatione* § *sed si, de legat.* 3ff.

bought an ivory library,” or a collection of books, as we say, “King Ptolemy collected the most beautiful library of all.”<sup>10</sup>

Here we find the tripartite definition from the *Digest*, expanded with illustrative quotations. At the end of the Renaissance, Justus Lipsius begins his history of ancient libraries, *De bibliothecis syntagma* (1602), with a paraphrase of the definition taken from the *Digest*.<sup>11</sup>

In the meantime, Perotti's *Cornucopiae* exemplifies another sense of the term library, unacknowledged by Roman civil law but amply vindicated by humanism, as a literary compilation or miscellany. A paradigmatic instance of this usage can be found on the title page of the expanded 1542 edition of Caelius Rhodiginus' *Lectiones antiquae*, which we have already examined in the context of the humanist *silva*. The 1542 title identifies the work as a cornucopia or treasury of the Greek and Latin languages and insists that it is no less useful in every subject of study than a giant library or *ingens bibliotheca*:

Lodovicus Coelius Rhodiginus' thirty books of ancient readings, revised by the author and expanded by a third: which, by virtue of their omnifarious explanation, taken from innumerable writers, of the most abstruse and recondite words and things in either language, are rightly called a Cornucopia or treasury of Greek and Latin, so that they may be no less useful in every subject of study than a giant library or a stack of commentaries.<sup>12</sup>

10 Niccolò Perotti, *Cornu copiae seu linguae Latinae commentarii*, vol. 6, ed. Fabio Stok (Sassoferrato, 1997) 136: “A quo et bibliotheca appellata, quod, ut ait Ulpianus, modo locum significat, in quo libri tenentur, ut quum dicimus ‘in bibliotheca est’, modo armarium, ubi libri servantur, unde ‘eburneam bibliothecam emisse’ dicimus, modo copiam ipsam librorum, ut ‘Ptolemaeum regem dicimus bibliothecam omnium pulcherrimam congregasse.’”

11 For the genealogy of this definition of *bibliotheca*, from the *Digest* to Lipsius, see Paul Nelles, “Juste Lipse et Alexandrie: les origines antiquaires de l’histoire des bibliothèques” in *Le pouvoir des bibliothèques*, ed. Baratin and Jacob (Paris, 1996) 224–42.

12 Konrad Gesner, *Bibliotheca universalis* (Zurich, 1545; reprint Osnabrück, 1966) 487 v°: “Lodovici Coelii Rhodigini lectionum antiquarum libri 30 recogniti ab auctore, atque ita locupletati, ut tertia plus parte auctiores sint reddit: qui ob omnifariam abstrusarum et reconditorum tam rerum quam vocum in utraque lingua ex innumeris scriptoribus desumptam explicationem... merito Cornucopiae seu Thesaurus utriusque linguae appellabuntur, quod in quocunque studiorum genere, non minor ipsorum quam ingentis bibliothecae, aut complurium commentariorum possit esse usus.”

We have transcribed the title from Konrad Gesner's *Bibliotheca universalis*, which has a natural affinity for works describing themselves as libraries. Gesner's own *Historia animalium* advertises itself, in the "Praefatio ad lectorem," as being as good as a library: "qui volumen nostrum habuerit, omnia de iisdem [rebus] scripta habere se persuasus esse debeat, unum scilicet pro bibliotheca, unum πολλῶν ἀντάξιον ἁλλῶν."<sup>13</sup> The Greek tag at the end is an allusion to Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 2.10.3 where Socrates advises that a good friend is worth many servants. So Gesner has written one book worth many books. Since antiquity, many books have called themselves libraries, such as the *Historical Library* of Diodorus Siculus, or the library of mythology attributed to Apollodorus, or the Βιβλιοθήκη in which the ninth-century Byzantine Patriarch Photius records all the books he has read, many of which are no longer extant.<sup>14</sup> Photius' work already anticipates the Renaissance use of *bibliotheca* to mean what we now call bibliography. Of all these authors, the one best qualified and most determined to elucidate the meaning of library is Gesner, whose *Bibliotheca universalis* is regarded as the founding work of modern bibliography.<sup>15</sup>

Gesner's dedicatory epistle to Leonard Beck of Beckenstein brings together many of the paradigmatic commonplaces of the humanist tradition, familiar to us from other contexts, while modestly explaining the multifarious value of his own work. The letter begins on an elegiac note with a catalogue of the lost libraries of antiquity pieced together from Aulus Gellius and Strabo and modern compilers like Polydore Vergil. The impressive list of lost books, articulated by the formula *ubi sunt*, leads to a solemn injunction to all good men to insure the conservation of the last remnants of the classical tradition:

Therefore, since so many and such precious books in every philosophy have gradually been lost, some consumed in flames and the tumult of war, some corrupted by time and waste, many indeed dispersed through negligence and the hatred of letters of the barbarians, of whom some invaded Italy long ago, and the Turks and others of their religion hold Greece and indeed nearly the whole world besides a small part of Europe, it behooves all good men, who take to heart the cause of literature, to

13 Konrad Gesner, *Historia animalium*, vol. 1 *De quadrupedibus viviparis* (Zurich, 1551) B2r<sup>o</sup>.

14 For the book as library in early modern Europe, see Roger Chartier, *L'Ordre des livres* (Aix-en-Provence, 1992) 69–94.

15 The best monograph on Gesner remains Alfredo Serrai, *Conrad Gesner* (Rome, 1990). The most thorough reading of the *Bibliotheca universalis* is Helmut Zedelmaier, *Bibliotheca universalis und Bibliotheca selecta: Das Problem der Ordnung des gelehrten Wissens in der frühen Neuzeit* (Cologne, 1992).

strive with all their might that those few works which have survived intact throughout the centuries should be conserved for posterity and not be sunk through our neglect. For if that should happen and future generations (God forbid) be deprived of books, there will be I warrant little difference between them and other animals, such as those nations which inhabit the remote islands recently discovered.<sup>16</sup>

Not wishing to inhabit an American wasteland of learning, Gesner has exerted himself to the utmost to compile his bibliography “so that princes and patrons may found libraries necessary for the transmission of books to posterity” (\*3 r<sup>o</sup>). Gesner writes as a custodian of cultural memory helping others to preserve the precious legacy of the past.<sup>17</sup>

In order to compile his vast repertory of all works ever written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, extant or non extant, ancient or modern, learned or unlearned, printed or manuscript, he has had recourse to some humble and unlikely sources. He has collected his material from printers’ catalogues, from library catalogues, from familiar correspondence, from conversation, and from lists of writers of the sort that he appends to the end of his own prefatory epistle and that we would call bibliographies. He has also consulted more orthodox sources, such as the *Suda*, Athenaeus, Stobaeus, and the *Greek Anthology*. To describe his own labor, Gesner uses the verb *corrado*, *corrader*: “Materiam operis undecunque corrasi” (\*3 r<sup>o</sup>). *Corrado*, a compound of *rado*, can mean to scrape or sweep together, as one scrapes together a sum of money or sweeps up the debris from the dining room floor, as in Horace.<sup>18</sup> The most neutral sense is simply to gather together disparate material, but the more colorful uses carry with them the stigma of belatedness or indigence. The humanist sweeps up the detritus of the classical tradition after the banquet of antiquity has ended.

Gesner is at pains to justify his comprehensive approach to bibliography, which lists every known author and work regardless of merit, so as not to prejudice the judgment of his readers: “Nos recitare tantum volumus, delectum iudiciumque liberum reliquimus aliis” (\*3v<sup>o</sup>). He is well aware of the incurable disease of writing deplored by Juvenal (*Saturae* 7.52).

16 *Bibliotheca universalis* \*2 v<sup>o</sup> to \*3 r<sup>o</sup>. My translation slightly abbreviates the Latin.

17 For Gesner and cultural memory, see Jan-Dirk Müller, “Universallibothek und Gedächtnis” in *Erkennen und Erinnern in Kunst und Literatur* (Tübingen, 1998) 285–309; and Paul Nelles, “Reading and Memory in the Universal Library: Conrad Gessner and the Renaissance Book” in *Ars reminiscendi: Mind and Memory in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Donald Beecher and Grant Williams (Toronto, 2009) 147–69.

18 Horace, *Sermones* 2.4.83–84 where *radere* means to sweep the mosaic floor after a meal.

Nevertheless, how to circumscribe the noxious and confusing multitude of books, and how to choose the best volumes for each discipline, as Emperor Justinian did in his day for the law, and how to segregate the good from the rest especially in barbarous works, and how to detect plagiarisms and excise them, and finally how to deter in future the rash urge to write lest it expand infinitely: all this I leave to more learned men to discuss and to kings and princes to decide. \*3v<sup>o</sup> to \*4r<sup>o</sup>

The reference to Justinian's *Digest* signals an important tension within Gesner's work and within humanism itself. The *Bibliotheca universalis*, Gesner would have us understand, is not a digest: it does not abridge or epitomize its material. A library is supposed to conserve the integrity of tradition and let others operate a selection, for a selection may falsify tradition by applying a false or transient system of values. By the same logic, Gesner condemns those publishers who chop up the works of one author and combine excerpts from different authors in one volume merely to make their book bigger. He describes this fraudulent inflation with what is by now to us a familiar figure of speech: "ut chartis undique consarcinatis volumina augeant" (\*5r<sup>o</sup>). The universal librarian is not a *consarcinator*; a library is not a rhapsody. While Erasmus, Zwinger, Turnèbe, and other humanists conceive of their scholarship as a kind of patchwork or web, Gesner prefers a different metaphor. By collecting all the known works of a given author in each bibliographical entry, and thus restoring the integrity of the author's *corpus*, he has emulated Aesculapius, who put back together the dismembered corpse of Hippolytus: "diligentissime enim singulorum scripta minutatim collegi et tanquam Aesculapius disiecta Virbii membra in unum corpus restitui" (\*5r<sup>o</sup>). The figure of Aesculapius, as Thomas Greene has shown in reference to Angelo Poliziano, is a powerful model of the humanist who aspires to reassemble the dispersed remnants of tradition and to restore the lost integrity of damaged texts.<sup>19</sup> The same figure in vernacular writers like Du Bellay can represent the misguided ambition of scholars to resuscitate a dead language and to reverse the course of time.<sup>20</sup> Both connotations of the figure, both heroism and futility, may inform Gesner's self-image.

19 Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy* (New Haven, 1982) 169–70 in reference to *Miscellaneorum centuria secunda* ch. 1, which Gesner could not have read since he and his contemporaries knew only the *centuria prima*.

20 Joachim Du Bellay, *Deffence et illustration de la langue Francoyse*, ed. Henri Chamard (Paris, 1970) 79: "Mais vous ne serez ja si bons massons (vous, qui estes si grands zelateurs des Langues Greque et Latine) que leur puissiez rendre celle forme que leur donnarent premierement ces bons et excellens architectes: et si vous esperez (comme fist Esculape



Alternating between elegy and triumph, the preface to the *Universal Library* takes a close measure of the ambitions of humanism, and not without enlisting a few well-circulated commonplaces. The first such *locus* that we encounter is one that we have already met under the rubric of humanist epistolography. While considering the irreparable loss of so many works of ancient philosophy and the simultaneous proliferation of modern printed books, Gesner is reminded of the saying χρύσεα χαλκείων ἐκατόμβοι' ἐννεαβοίων, which he cites without attribution or translation (\*2r<sup>o</sup>). Perhaps he was confident that, after Homer, Cicero, Gellius, Justinian, Poliziano, Beroaldo, Budé, Erasmus, et alia, he did not need to remind his readers of the precise genealogy of the saying *chrusea chalkeion* or gold for bronze. Or perhaps he thought that only a trained humanist could appreciate what a bad deal modernity has made by exchanging the gold of ancient literature for the bronze of modern writing. In any event, he could be confident that the saying is well suited to a letter since Cicero cites it, as we have seen, in his correspondence with Atticus (6.1.22) as does Justinian in the preface to the *Digest*, known as the *Constitutio omnem*, which takes the form of a letter addressed by the Emperor to several eminent jurists. In between Homer's *Iliad*, where Diomedes and Glaucus exchange armor of unequal value, and our universal librarian, the most salient intermediary for the transmission of *chrusea chalkeion* is the Erasmian adage *Diomedis et Glauci permutatio*. For Erasmus, this saying represents an unequal exchange and, in the conclusion added in 1515, it signifies a grave moral compromise whereby someone sacrifices their integrity and even their salvation for the sake of worldly advancement. A courtier for instance exchanges gold for bronze when he loses the friendship of Christ in order to gain the friendship of the prince (ASD 11-1:216). This satirical inflection is Erasmus' original contribution to a topos that is largely concerned, as in Gesner, with historical supersession and with the positive or negative value which we assign to the passage of time. As deployed by humanists, the saying χρύσεα χαλκείων focuses our attention on the vicissitudes of textual transmission over the long course of time.

Erasmus reviews the genealogy of the adage very thoroughly, beginning with three verses from Homer's *Iliad* (6.234–36), to which Socrates alludes in Plato's *Symposium* (218e–219a), Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1136b9–10), Plutarch in the *Moralia* (1063e–1064a), Cicero in one of his longest letters to Atticus, Pliny the Younger in the shortest letter of his correspondence (5.2), Martial in his *Epigrams* (9.94), and Aulus Gellius in the *Noctes Atticae* (2.23)

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des membres d'Hippolyte) que par ces fragmentz recueilliz elles puyssent estre resuscitées, vous vous abusez." Du Bellay, as Chamard points out, is following Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo delle lingue* (Venice, 1542) 130 r<sup>o</sup>.

to express what is lost in Latin translation of Greek originals. This latter usage clearly concords with Gesner's sense of loss and decline. The most contentious use of this topos and the one that most interests Erasmus and his fellow humanists is the citation by Justinian at the very end of the liminary text known to the Renaissance as the preface to the *Digest*. Here Justinian congratulates Theophilus and his fellow jurists that their age has witnessed an exchange of laws such as Glaucus and Diomedes made when they exchanged armor in Homer's *Iliad*.<sup>21</sup> Erasmus comments dryly that Justinian is rather too prone to *philautia* and self-satisfaction if he prefers his own rhapsody of laws to the complete works of the classical jurists (ASD II-1:215). Justinian has indeed made an unequal exchange, but he has played Glaucus where he thought to impersonate Diomedes. Justinian must have assumed, Erasmus explains, that he had improved the law by replacing a lot of useless and tedious volumes with better and briefer tomes, "tum meliora tum breviora," but Erasmus clearly regrets the "integra volumina" lost in this process of excerption and consolidation (ASD II-1:215–16). What is progress for a sixth-century emperor appears to be an example of decadence to a Renaissance humanist.

Yet the process is complicated by the intervening centuries and their interpretations of the *Digest*. As Poliziano, Beroaldo, Budé, and Erasmus all point out, the medieval *glossator* Accursius has explained the allusion to Glaucus and Diomedes incorrectly in his exposition of the *Digest*, thus exemplifying various attributes of medieval scholasticism such as *impudentia* (Erasmus), *fanaticum deliramentum* (Budé), *meras nugas* (Beroaldo), or *monstra rerum verborumque* (Poliziano).<sup>22</sup> In chapter 93 of the *Miscellaneorum centuria prima*, Poliziano points out further that the verse from Homer, omitted in printed editions of the *Digest* published in the years immediately preceding the publication of his own work in 1489, should be restored to the text of Justinian's preface. In this way Poliziano carries out the task of Aesculapius by restoring the dismembered body of ancient literature. Yet, what he restores, Erasmus argues credibly, is a mistake: Justinian mistakenly preferred the new to the old and the part to the whole. If he had not commissioned his digest of Roman civil law, we might still have access to the sources of classical jurisprudence

21 *Iustiniani Digesta*, ed. Theodore Mommsen (Berlin, 1893) xvii: "quia vestris temporibus talis legum inventa est permutatio, qualem et apud Homerum patrem omnis virtutis Glaucus et Diomedes inter se faciunt dissimilia permutantes: χρύσσεα χαλκείων ἑκατόμβοι' ἐννεαβοίων."

22 Erasmus ASD II-1:215; Guillaume Budé, *Annotationes in Pandectas* (Paris, 1542) 279; Filippo Beroaldo the Elder, *Annotationes Centum*, ed. Lucia Ciapponi (Binghamton, NY, 1995) 107; Angelo Poliziano, *Omnia opera* (Venice, 1498; reprint Rome, 1968) I vii r<sup>o</sup>.

rather than being constrained by imperial hubris to rely on “centones illos suos et inaequales legum rapsodias” (ASD II-1:215). The *Digest* thus joins the invidious ranks of *centos* and rhapsodies, like the Ciceronian orations and neo-Latin epics scorned in the *Dialogus Ciceronianus* or like the *Adages* themselves. Erasmus deplores the bad bargain Justinian made, trading gold for bronze, and at the same time he emulates this unequal commerce through his obsessive compilation of fragments and excerpts. Both the emperor and the humanist prize brevity over integrity.

To return to the *Universal Library*, Gesner makes clear that the substitution of new books for old is a cause for sorrow and dismay. It is also an occasion for quotation: “Sic omnia fatis in peius ruere, ac retro sublapsa referri” (\*2r<sup>o</sup>; “thus all things by fate decline and fall back again”). This verse from Virgil’s *Georgics* (1.200), prompted by a reflection on the decay of seeds, expresses in Gesner’s preface a sense of inevitable decline. History itself is an unequal exchange: we trade gold for bronze as the past yields to the present. Gesner may well have been familiar with yet another use of Homer’s χρύσεα χαλκείων from Pliny’s *Natural History*. Pliny somewhat implausibly recalls the exchange of armor between Diomedes and Glaucus as a sign of a happier age, “quanto feliciore aevo” (*NH* 33.7), when people bartered to satisfy their needs and money had yet to be invented. Gesner too seems nostalgic for a *felicior aevus* when the libraries of Alexandria, Constantinople, Pergamum, and Rome vindicated the glory of learning. What remains of all these libraries, he asks, besides hollow fame, and we may add, besides his book?<sup>23</sup> The *Bibliotheca universalis* purports to conserve every single vestige and every name that remains from the wreckage of the past. In lieu of the repositories of ancient civilization, which have been swallowed up by time and neglect and barbarian invasion, Gesner offers us his Herculean labor: when gold has all been spent, we ought to be grateful for bronze. Gesner provides an example, and perhaps the prime example, of the library as an elegiac topos in Renaissance culture.

For a different and singularly ill-timed use of the library to express the ambitions of Renaissance humanism, we can turn to the dedicatory epistle which Janus Lascaris addressed to Piero de’ Medici at the head of his edition of the *Greek Anthology* in 1494, on the eve of the French invasion and the expulsion of the Medici from Florence. In his letter, Lascaris proclaims, in Latin, the Renaissance of the original and authentic Greek alphabet to be used in printing the newly recovered Greek manuscripts in the Laurentian Library in Florence, which he hails as the successor to the Library of Alexandria. Having

23 “Quid vero nunc ex omnibus illis tam gloriosis bibliothecis praeter inanem famam reliqui est?” \*2v<sup>o</sup>.

emigrated from Byzantium to Italy and entered the service of Lorenzo de' Medici in Florence, Lascaris went back to Greece in 1491 to acquire precious manuscripts for his patron. By his own estimate, he returned the following year with two hundred Greek manuscripts, including eighty classical and patristic works previously unknown in the West.<sup>24</sup> While his envoy was busy ransacking Greek monastic libraries "ad communem studiosorum utilitatem," Lorenzo died and left Piero in charge of Florence and the Florentine Renaissance. Appealing to hereditary predisposition, Lascaris exhorts Piero to deposit these newly acquired manuscripts in the Laurentian Library, which was then still under construction, so that his name will be celebrated by posterity with no less praise than King Ptolemy, who built the Library of Alexandria.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, he expects Piero to insure that these works are printed using the Greek characters that Lascaris has revived for his edition of the *Greek Anthology* and which are meant to supplant the "perplexed and circumvolved letters" used in the first generation of Greek printed books in Italy.<sup>26</sup> The lettering that Lascaris proposes, based on numismatic and epigraphic models, resembles the capital letters of the modern Greek alphabet combined with breathing marks and accents introduced in the post-classical period. In fairness, they are much easier to read than the Greek fonts based on Byzantine cursive handwriting adopted by Renaissance printers. In his confident missive, Lascaris looks forward to a typographic Renaissance and a Hellenistic Renaissance anchored in the successor to the Alexandrian Library sponsored by the successors to the Ptolemaic dynasty. Of course, he was wrong on all counts. Piero was about to be kicked out of Florence, no printer in subsequent years would adopt his Greek font, and when the manuscripts he brought back from Greece finally reached print, they were fated to appear in the scarcely legible script favored

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24 "Laurentius . . . ducenta nuperrime antiquorum volumina e Graecia et finitimis regionibus collecta in hanc praeclarissimam civitatem magna diligentia et sumptibus transferenda curaverat. Inter quae non minus quam octoginta opera hac tempestate incognita." From the unpaginated dedication to *Anthologia Graeca, sive Florilegium diversorum Epigrammatum*, ed. Janus Lascaris (Florence, 1494). I used the copy in the Lilly Library of Indiana University with the call number PA3458.A2.

25 "volumina . . . quae tu mox omnia Petre Medices et permulta alia iam diu conquisita in pulcherrimam illam bibliothecam tuam quae iam semistructa conspicitur ad communem studiosorum utilitatem solita benignitate familiae collocabis ut tuum quoque nomen non ab uno verum a quamplurimorum ingeniis hoc beneficio excultis et auctis apud posteros illustretur non minori laude quam Ptolemaei Regis."

26 "Cumque animadverterem earum notas quae in praesentia sunt in usu impressioni adhibitas nec excudi commodè nec apte invicem cohaerere posse quod perplexae nimium et circumvolutae sint . . ."

by Aldo Manuzio. Thus Lascaris' edition is both a graphic masterpiece and a monument of obsolescence.

When he salutes Piero as the new Ptolemy, Lascaris cannot resist citing a couple of Greek proverbs, perhaps in his haste to display the nascent alphabet which he has designed. It is through his library, "pulcherrimam illam bibliothecam tuam," that Piero will earn fame, not from one man alone, but from the whole community of library users, since, as the saying goes, 'ΕΙΣ ΓΑΡ 'ΑΝΗΡ 'ΟΥΔΕΙΣ 'ΑΝΗΡ. ΚΑΙ ΜΙΑ ΧΕΙΡ Δ' ὄν 'ΕΑΡ 'ΟΥ ΠΟΙΕΙ.<sup>27</sup> The first saying, "one man is no man," seems to derive ultimately from Euripides and appears in the Byzantine paroemiographers before passing into Erasmus' collection as *Unus vir nullus vir* (440). For Erasmus, the saying applies to the solitary life and especially to the solitude of literary study, which is desolate without a companion and rival of the same muse (ASD II-1:517). Oddly, Lascaris uses it to mean one applause is no applause, in order to spur Piero on to earn the gratitude of all humanists through his endowment of a library. Of course, such an endowment helps to build a community of scholars, who, by working together, will be immune to the solitude deplored by Erasmus. The other saying that he quotes in his resuscitated Greek script is "one swallow does not make a spring." In the epideictic context of the dedicatory epistle, this may mean that one adulator does not make a reputation, but in adage 694 *Una hirundo non facit ver*, Erasmus reveals a very different potential in this venerable saying.

The very structure of his commentary elicits the methodological implications of this proverb for Renaissance humanism. Not content with one reading, Erasmus deploys a succession of possible interpretations, coordinated by the conjunction *aut*, as if to demonstrate that one citation does not make a commentary, or one explanation does not make an adage. This is the spirit and method of eclectic humanism, which draws on a wide variety of sources arranged non-hierarchically. Moreover, Erasmus will redeploy this same adage in his *Life of Saint Jerome* in the context of the dispute over the best Latin prose style, a topic most famously treated in the *Dialogus Ciceronianus*. To refute ancient and modern critics of Jerome's Latin, Erasmus insists that, just as one swallow does not make a spring, so one talent or one quality alone does not make a man eloquent.<sup>28</sup> There is no unique model of eloquence.

<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately I can only approximate Lascaris' peculiar typography.

<sup>28</sup> "Ut, iuxta Graecorum proverbium, non una hirundo ver efficit, ita non una quaequam dos facit eloquentem." *Hieronymi Stridonensis vita per Desiderium Erasmum Roterodamum in Erasmi opuscula*, ed. Wallace Ferguson (The Hague, 1933) 125–190; 187.

For what does it mean to be Ciceronian if not to speak well, even if you speak differently?<sup>29</sup> This is the quintessential principle of eclectic humanism.

Cervantes shows us a comic use of the same proverb in his masterpiece *Don Quijote*. Early in the first part of the novel, while accompanying the goatherds to the funeral of Grisóstomo, the hero encounters a gentleman on horseback named señor Vivaldo. In order to diagnose the nature of Don Quijote's madness and to alleviate the burden of his journey, Vivaldo engages the knight errant in conversation. The better to provoke his interlocutor and to entertain his companions, the sane man, whose reading habits are not so very different from those of the madman, remarks that knights errant may be suspected of idolatry since they always commend themselves to their ladies as if they were their deity or "como si ellas fueran su Dios" (1,13,170). Don Quijote insists that a genuine knight errant must be in love with a lady: "no puede ser que haya caballero andante sin dama" (170). When Vivaldo mentions Amadís de Gaula's brother don Galaor as an example of a valiant and famous knight who nevertheless had no lady to whom he could commend himself, Don Quijote is quick to retort, "Señor, una golondrina no hace verano" (171). The example of Don Galaor does not invalidate the uniform model of knight errantry; he is, as we say in English, the exception that proves the rule. Apparently, Don Quijote's ideal of chivalry does not admit of eclecticism, and so he uses the saying, "one swallow does not make a spring," counter to its Erasmian usage. Later, in the Sierra Morena, Don Quijote will take a more eclectic approach to chivalry, basing his conduct in part on Amadís and in part on the hero of the *Orlando Furioso*, but that is a different story.

The authors whom Erasmus cites in his commentary on adage 694 are Horace, Aristotle, Aristophanes, and Sophocles. In book one of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle cites the proverb in extended form, "one swallow does not make a spring, nor one day," in order to illustrate his definition of *eudaimonia* or happiness, which can only be predicated of a complete life or *bios teleios* (1098a18–19). The saying in effect warns us not to judge of our happiness too soon and is thus closely related to Solon's unwanted advice to Croesus to look to the end before pronouncing himself blessed, also cited by Aristotle a few chapters further on in book one (1100a11). Erasmus likens the adage "one swallow does not make a spring" to the phrase "one man does not make a city," quoted by Haimon to his father Creon in Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* (v. 734), which the audience must have welcomed as an expression of the anti-monarchic sentiment of Athenian democracy. All of these contexts apply

29 "Siquidem quid aliud est esse Ciceronianum, quam optime dicere, etiam si diverse dicat?" 187.

rather ominously to Lascaris' patron and dedicatee Piero de' Medici. Lascaris stands in relation to Piero as Solon to Croesus or Haimon to Creon, admonishing an obtuse ruler of the dangers of premature satisfaction or authoritarian hubris. These meanings remain latent in Lascaris' letter but emerge more clearly when read back through Erasmus' adage.

The proverbial single swallow does not seem to pertain to the ambition to refound the Alexandrian Library or to revive the culture of Hellenism, until we recall that it is a false harbinger of renewal. The early swallow stands for false hope, impatience, self-delusion, grandiose ambition, all the ingredients of Renaissance ideology. For it to reappear just as the Medici spring was about to end is a rare coincidence that imparts an invidiously prophetic character to Lascaris' strangely imprescient letter. Lascaris' career, like the Laurentian Library, survived the vicissitudes of the Medici dynasty, and both became important agents for the circulation of commonplaces in Renaissance humanism. The resilience of circulatory speech, defying the erosion of time, reimburses the Renaissance for its cultural loss. Gold for bronze is still a *mot doré* in the currency of humanism.



## In a Roman Mirror

The apophthegm, as Plutarch reminded emperor Trajan and as all Renaissance humanists remembered, is the truest mirror of a man's character, more eloquent than his deeds because less subject to the whims of fortune. Apophthegms are pithy sayings given currency by the great actors of history who pronounce them, and the humanists were particularly keen to collect these sayings, along with adages, examples and other commonplaces, and to deploy them in their own speech and writing. This chapter proposes to take the apophthegm as a key to the contested relationship between Montaigne and Cicero. In his "Consideration on Cicero" and his essay on books, Montaigne disparages Cicero's style as boring, his character as flawed, and his vanity as scandalous. Everywhere, Montaigne strenuously disavows the imitation of Ciceronian eloquence, and yet, when criticizing Cicero, he makes an exception for the *Letters to Atticus*, from which he discreetly borrows a certain number of aphorisms that he recycles in his own essays without attribution. One of these sayings reappears, previously undetected by Montaigne criticism, in the essay "On vanity," where Montaigne appropriates a phrase coined by Cicero in his *Letters to Atticus* (8.7) which was admired by ancient compilers as an example of *urbanitas* and which eventually worked its way through many intermediaries into Erasmus' *Apophthegmata*. This apophthegm not only represents Cicero's legacy as a master of Laconic style, in contrast to his more familiar association with the periodic style, but it is also an important expression of Cicero's political dilemma, for which Montaigne feels a clandestine empathy in the midst of France's civil wars. The genealogy of this apophthegm can serve as a case study of the circulation of a commonplace form which, though it has received somewhat short shrift in this study, reveals a number of affinities for the related forms of the adage, the essay, the joke, and even the novella or short comic narrative.

In his classic study of early modern rhetoric, *L'âge de l'éloquence*, Marc Fumaroli recognized, in the course of the sixteenth century, a first and a second Ciceronian Renaissance. One of the texts which he takes to be paradigmatic of this second Ciceronian Renaissance is the lecture delivered by Marc Antoine Muret in November, 1582 when he inaugurated his course on the *Letters to Atticus* at La Sapienza in Rome.<sup>1</sup> Muret begins his lecture somewhat

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1 Muret, *Orationes* II, 16 in *Opera omnia* vol. 1 (Geneva, 1971) 399–407. See Fumaroli 173–175.

defensively with the acknowledgement that the epistolary genre has traditionally been held in low esteem, and so the ensuing oration is in part an *apologia epistolarum*.<sup>2</sup> Though a humble genre, the letter is well suited to inculcate pure and correct Latin usage, and that is of course the object of a course in eloquence. Moreover, the familiar letter provides a rare access to the author's true self. Borrowing a topos from Plutarch's *Lives*, Muret insists that nothing reveals a man's character as much as the casual deed or word or joke recorded in his correspondence.<sup>3</sup> And so the correspondence with Atticus allows us an intimate familiarity both with Cicero's *ethos* and with his profound political prudence, which he may have dissimulated in his more public pronouncements.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the orator, the holder of the chair in rhetoric, is constrained to admit, in proverbial style, and though he may seem to cut down his own vines, *vineta mea caedere*, that nowadays almost every use of eloquence has disappeared without a trace, *nec vola nec vestigium*, except for the use we make in writing letters.<sup>5</sup> The scope of public oratory has narrowed so severely, Muret reminds his audience in Counter-Reformation Rome, that only the sermon and the panegyric remain.<sup>6</sup> Under these circumstances, the best way to achieve political advancement through eloquence is to master the epistolary style on the model of Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*. Such mastery, he assures his students, will allow them to arrive at the intimate familiarity of princes and to claim the highest honors in society: "qui bene epistolam scribunt, facillime ad intimam principum familiaritatem perveniant et ad maximarum rerum tractationem adhibeantur, maximis plerumque honoribus augeantur" (Muret 406). In this

2 "Sequitur nunc, ut iis obtreptatoribus respondeam, qui omnem epistolarum lectionem leve quiddam ac prope nugatorium esse aiunt" (Muret 403).

3 "Praeclare Plutarchus in Alexandro, 'Non,' inquit, 'ut quaeque maxime illustris actio est, ita maxime ingenium hominis patefacit; imo vero interdum exiguum aliquod factum dictumve aut iocus aliquis magis detegit hominis mores quam urbium expugnationes et pugnae, in quibus multa hominum milia ceciderunt.'" Muret 405 paraphrasing Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* 1.

4 "Tum praeterea Ciceronis admirabilis prudentia et scientia reipublicae tractandae nusquam se magis quam in his epistolis prodit" (Muret 405).

5 "Accedit haec quoque, quam dubitavi equidem num adferre deberem, ne vineta mea, ut aiunt, caedere . . . viderer. . . Hodie, adolescentes, si verum amamus, omnis prope usus eloquentiae, praeterquam in scribendis epistolis, ita de medio sublatus est, ut nec vola nec vestigium appareat" (Muret 405–406). The two proverbs are Otto 1898 and 1934. For *nec vola nec vestigium* and the Erasmus variant, see above page 25.

6 "Eloquentia . . . iussa est oblectare se in his nostris scholasticis ac pulverulentis disputationibus, in sacris concionibus, et interdum in gratulationibus, quae fiunt ad principes aut in eorum funeribus exornandis" (Muret 406).

way Muret rehabilitates the political function of rhetoric with a reminder that new politics dictate new rhetorical models.

Montaigne's considerations on Cicero are considerably less favorable than those expressed by Muret, and yet in some ways they exemplify the trend that Muret announces in his contemporary oration. Essay 40 of the first book, "Considération sur Cicéron" criticizes Cicero and Pliny indignantly for seeking public glory from private letters and insists that aristocrats and statesmen should never take pride in such a plebeian achievement as writing well. As for himself, Montaigne thinks that he would have been pretty good at letter writing if he had had a fitting correspondent (1,40,252). In effect, if his friend Etienne de La Boétie had not died young, Montaigne would never have invented the essay and gone into the epistolary line instead. Montaigne claims for himself a kind of style that we can call epistolary style:

J'ay naturellement un stile comique et privé, mais c'est d'une forme mienne, inepte aux negotiations publiques, comme en toutes façons est mon langage: trop serré, desordonné, coupé, particulier. 1,40,252

As Kathy Eden argues,<sup>7</sup> the pair of adjectives "comique et privé" may have a Ciceronian resonance, since in a letter to Curio of 53 BC, Cicero proposes a tripartite typology of the letter of which one type, one of the two that please him the most, is designated as familiar and comic: "Reliqua sunt epistularum genera duo quae me magno opere delectant, unum familiare et iocosum" (*Ad fam.* 2.4.1). Cicero hastens to add that this type is unbecoming of a Roman citizen in such perilous times for the Republic: "civem me hercule non puto esse qui temporibus his ridere possit." Montaigne feels no such inhibition. By his own account, he cultivates the private, personal eloquence of letter writing, which, as Muret points out, in no way disqualifies him from public honors, and thus we may be suspicious of his self-characterization as "inepte aux negotiations publiques."

Moreover, it should be noted that the essay "Considération sur Cicéron" is from beginning to end a tissue of *apophthegmata* collected and numbered by Erasmus and other compilers, most of which deal with the misplaced pride of great men in humble achievements, like the king who was a good drinker or the general who was a good musician and other examples which seem to incriminate the Roman consul who was good at letter writing. Here follows a catalogue of Montaigne's apophthegms, some from the original 1580 edition of the essay and some added in the 1588 or B edition, and each paired with its Erasmian source:

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7 *The Renaissance Rediscovery of intimacy* (Chicago, 2012) 102.

[B] Les compaignons de Demosthenes en l'ambassade vers Philippus loüoient ce Prince d'estre beau, eloquent et bon beuveur: Demosthenes disoit que c'estoient louanges qui appartennoient mieux à une femme, à un advocat, à une esponge, qu'à un Roy. I,40,250

Demosthenes 5. Demosthenes was one of the ten legates whom the Athenians sent to Philip of Macedon. So when Aeschines and Philocrates, whom Philip had especially honored, returned from their embassy and praised the king for many reasons but especially for being good looking, eloquent, and a good drinker, Demosthenes objected that there was nothing worthy of a king among their praises: the first pertained to women, the second to sophists, and the third to sponges.<sup>8</sup>

De façon que Philippus, Roy de Macedoine, ayant ouy ce grand Alexandre, son fils, chanter en un festin à l'envy des meilleurs musiciens: N'as tu pas honte, luy dict-il, de chanter si bien? Et, à ce mesme Philippus, un musicien contre lequel il debatoit de son art: Ja à Dieu ne plaise, Sire, dit-il, qu'il t'advienne jamais tant de mal que tu entendes ces choses là mieux que moy. I,40,251

Philip of Macedon 32. When Philip had heard his son sing well somewhere, he criticized him humanely, saying, 'Aren't you ashamed of learning how to sing so well?' meaning that other arts are worthier of a king.<sup>9</sup>

Philip of Macedon 29. Just as he himself was urbane, he appreciated others' witty sayings. So when he wanted to criticize a musician during a meal and to talk about his way of playing, 'God forbid, o king' said the musician, 'that you should know my business better than I do.'<sup>10</sup>

[B] Un Roy doit pouvoir respondre comme Iphicrates respondit à l'orateur qui le pressoit en son invective, de cette maniere: Et bien, qu'es-tu

8 "Demosthenes unus fuerat ex decem quos Athenienses legatos ad Philippum Macedonem miserant. Itaque posteaquam Aeschines et Philocrates, quos praecipue fuerat complexus Philippus, a legatione reversi, quum aliis multis nominibus praedicarent regem, tum his praecipue, quod esset formosus, facundus, et ad bibendum strennuus, Demosthenes ita cavillatus est, ut diceret in his laudibus nihil esse dignum rege; nam primam esse foeminarum, alteram sophistarum, tertiam spongiarum" ASD IV-4: 367–68.

9 "Philippus quum audisset filium suum quodam in loco scite cecinisse, civiliter obiurgavit, dicens: 'Non te tui pudet, qui noris tam belle canere?', significans alias artes esse rege digniores" ASD IV-4:293.

10 "Quemadmodum ipse fuit urbanus, ita aliorum salse dictis delectabatur. Itaque quum cantorem inter coenandum vellet reprehendere deque pulsu chordarum loqueretur, 'Dii' inquit cantor 'prohibeant, o rex, ne tu me melius haec noris' " ASD IV-4:292.

pour faire tant le brave? es-tu homme d'armes? es-tu archier? es-tu piquier?—Je ne suis rien de tout cela, mais je suis celui qui sçait commander à tous ceux-là. 1,40,251

Iphicrates 5. To an orator who asked him in a speech, 'Who are you to lord it over everyone: a horseman, an archer, a foot soldier?' 'I am none of those,' he said, 'but I know how to command all of them.' He thought it was nobler to be a good general than any kind of soldier.<sup>11</sup>

Et Antisthenes print pour argument de peu de valeur en Ismenias, dequoy on le vantoit d'estre excellent joüeur de flutes. 1,40,251

Antisthenes 62. To some who admired Ismenias for being a superb flute player, he said, 'He must be worthless, because if he was worth something, he wouldn't be a skilled flute player.' He judged that those who devoted so much effort to Dionysian arts could never turn out to be good men.<sup>12</sup>

J'adjousteray encore un conte que nous lisons de luy à ce propos, pour nous faire toucher au doigt son naturel. Il avoit à orer en public, et estoit un peu pressé du temps pour se preparer à son aise. Eros, l'un de ses serfs, le vint advertir que l'audience estoit remise au lendemain. Il en fut si aise qu'il luy donna liberté pour cette bonne nouvelle. 1,40,252

Cicero 21. Cicero was so anxious about speaking well that when he was supposed to plead a cause before the centumvirs and the day was at hand, he freed his slave Eros, who had brought him the message that the trial was put off until the next day. Somebody included this among the apophthegms, even though it isn't one.<sup>13</sup>

11 "Oratori cuidam in concione hunc in modum ipsum interroganti; 'Quis es ut tam sublimes geras spiritus? num eques, aut sagittarius, aut scutatus, aut pedes?' 'Nihil horum,' inquit, 'sed qui his omnibus imperare didici.' Sentiens, pulcrius esse, bonum praestare ducem, quam quemvis militem" LB 4:248F.

12 "Quibusdam admirantibus Ismeniam, quod esset insignis tibicen, 'Nequam,' inquit, 'hominem esse oportet, nam si bonae frugis esset, non esset egregius tibicen.' Judicabat, eos non posse bonos viros evadere, qui tantum operae Dionysiacy artibus impendissent" LB 4:329A.

13 "Adeo vero sollicitus erat M. Tullius bene dicendi tamque anxium huic rei studium impendit, ut quum causam oraturus esset apud centumviro iamque dies instaret, Erota servum manumiserit eo quod nunciasset cognitionem in posterum diem fuisse prorogatum. Et hoc aliquis inter apophthegmata adiecit, quum non sit" ASD IV-4:355.

This last example is one of Cicero's own apophthegms, number 21 in the traditional numbering, which is not a saying at all but an anecdote or what Montaigne calls "un conte." Erasmus insists that it does not belong among the *apophthegmata*, but he still puts it there, acknowledging the blurred boundary between the apophthegm and the short story. This story is about the occasion when Cicero was supposed to deliver a speech which he had not yet prepared, and when his slave announced that the speech was called off, he was so relieved that he granted the slave his freedom. This is supposed to reflect poorly on Cicero, who was either too consumed with "bene dicendi studium," according to Erasmus' rubric, or simply too slow at speech writing. Oddly, the apophthegm is a form that exemplifies the prompt style of speech, what Montaigne calls "le parler prompt," and Cicero has plenty of prompt rejoinders to his credit; but Montaigne chose the one apophthegm where Cicero doesn't say anything.

There is another passage from the essay "Considération sur Cicéron," added to the Exemple de Bordeaux, that helps to tighten the bonds between the related genres of essay and apophthegm. Reacting to the early reception of the *Essais*, Montaigne expresses his impatience with those readers who pay more attention to the words than the meaning. If he is not greatly mistaken, few authors sow their subject matter as thickly on the page as he does: "Si suis je trompé . . . si nul escrivain l'a semée ny guere plus materielle ny au moins plus drue en son papier" (I,40,251). In order to fit as much as possible, he only stacks up the heads: "Pour en ranger davantage, je n'en entasse que les testes" (251). By which we may understand that he only broaches the topic; he merely adumbrates or hints at his argument, but leaves the rest to us. If we know how to peel his stories, we can produce infinite essays, because they carry the seed of a richer and bolder matter:

Et combien y ay-je espandu d'histoires qui ne disent mot, lesquelles qui voudra esplucher un peu ingenieusement, en produira infinis Essais. . . Elles portent souvent, hors de mon propos, la semence d'une matiere plus riche et plus hardie. I,40,251

The idiosyncratic imagery of this key programmatic statement, enlisting verbs such as *semer*, *entasser*, *esplucher*, and *produire* and the noun *semence*, makes the task of reading and writing a kind of agricultural labor in keeping with the topos of the *optimus agricola*.<sup>14</sup> In this vivid statement of the poetics of the

14 For this topos, see Eric MacPhail, "Optimus agricola: Nature and Culture in Renaissance Prose Theory," *Prose Studies* 28 (2006) 184–196.

essay, Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani has recognized the rhetorical figure of *significatio*, which Quintilian defines as a variety of *emphasis* that means more than it says: “plus significat quam dicit” (*Institutio oratoria* 8.3.83).<sup>15</sup> For Mathieu-Castellani, Montaigne appreciates the essay as a form that means more than it says. This is precisely the property that Erasmus claims for his *Apophthegmata* in the dedicatory epistle to William of Cleves (ep. 2431): “Optimum apophthegmatis genus est, quod paucis verbis sensum non vulgarem significat potius quam exprimit” (ASD IV-4:44; The genre of the apophthegm is the best because in a few words it conveys an uncommon meaning without stating it). The apophthegm is an instrument of suggestion and insinuation, planting the seeds of a future crop of meaning to be harvested by a reader who may also be a writer. When Montaigne wants to compress as much matter as possible into his essays, he naturally turns to the apophthegm.

Elsewhere, in his essay on anger, Montaigne develops one of the favorite themes of his work: “le dire est autre chose que le faire” (II,31,715). Saying is not doing, and it’s not as good as doing, he says. The essayist professes to admire above all those authors who practice what they preach or who match their actions to their words. The counter example is Cicero, who was better suited to the theory than the practice of virtue. It is in this context that Montaigne tells us that he wants to get to know the authors whom he reads, especially when they write on ethics: “Je ne voy jamais auteur, mesmement de ceux qui traictent de la vertu et des offices, que je ne recherche curieusement quel il a esté” (II,31,716). He wants to know the *ethos* of the ethicists. This curiosity, also known as the “hermeneutics of intimacy,”<sup>16</sup> accords well with what Montaigne says in his most extensive criticism of Cicero from his essay on books, “Des livres” (II,10). Neither Cicero’s style nor his character meet with Montaigne’s approval, and yet, he remarks, he reads the *Letters to Atticus* just as willingly as he reads Seneca’s letters to Lucilius or Plutarch’s *Moralia*, his two favorite books (II,10,414). What interests him in Cicero’s correspondence are not the writer’s public deeds but his private humors, “ses humeurs privées” (414) and his true thoughts, “ses naïfs jugemens,” which he reveals more candidly in his letters than he ever would in his more public performances (415). Here Montaigne’s essay coincides with Muret’s lecture on the *Letters to Atticus*, and both follow the principle espoused by Plutarch in explaining why he records the lives and sayings of famous men. In his *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch justifies his style of biography on the grounds that candid remarks and private gestures reveal character better than the most heroic exploits on the battlefield (*Alexander* 1);

15 Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, “Dire, Signifier: La Figure de la *Significatio* dans les *Essais*,” *Montaigne Studies* 3 (1991) 68–81.

16 Eden (2012) 109.



and in dedicating his *Sayings of Kings and Generals* or *Apophthegmata regum et imperatorum*, he assures Emperor Trajan that such sayings are the true mirror of the mind (*Moralia* 172C–D).<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, epistolary apophthegms, such as those retrieved from Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*, ought to be the very best and most faithful mirror of the mind.

Alas, Cicero's mind may not be so easily reflected in his speech. The topos of speech as the mirror of the mind is at once among the most pervasive and most dubious of Renaissance commonplaces, and the flaws in its internal logic have come under recent scrutiny.<sup>18</sup> The topos is certainly a favorite of Erasmus, who insists, in the duplicitous words of Folly from the exordium to *The Praise of Folly*, that speech is the least lying mirror of the mind: "oratio, minime mendax animi speculum" (ASD IV-3:74).<sup>19</sup> Folly's phrase is in turn a quotation of Socrates, as reported in the *Apophthegmata* under the rubric *oratio speculum animi*. In a ubiquitous anecdote, Socrates tells a potential student, "Speak so that I may see you," signifying that a man's mind shines forth less clearly in his face than in his speech, which is the most certain and least mendacious mirror of the mind.<sup>20</sup> This wishful characterization of speech as a minimally false mirror reminds us that not all mirrors are true, as Erasmus explains in the *Lingua*: some mirrors reflect their object *bona fide* while others distort and misrepresent what they reflect (ASD IV-1A:82). Should we take Folly to be the true mirror of Socrates? As Marie-Luce Demonet has observed, when Erasmus attributes specular properties to speech, he is announcing a moral ideal rather than a linguistic theory.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Renaissance compilers were acutely aware of the paradox of collecting and appropriating famous phrases

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- 17 For this topos and its development in Erasmus, see Tineke ter Meer, "A True Mirror of the Mind: Some Observations on the *Apophthegmata* of Erasmus," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 23 (2003) 67–93.
  - 18 See Robert Kilpatrick, "'Clouds on a Wall': The Mirror of Speech in the *Adagiorum Chiliades* and the *Moriae Encomium*," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 33 (2013) 55–74 and, in a broader context, James Helgeson, *The Lying Mirror: The First-Person Stance and Sixteenth-Century Writing* (Geneva, 2012).
  - 19 For this and other instances of the mirror metaphor in Erasmus, see Ari Wesseling, "Dutch Proverbs and Ancient Sources in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994) 369–372.
  - 20 Socrates 70. "Tum Socrates ad puerum 'Loquere igitur,' inquit, 'adolescens, ut te videam,' significans ingenium hominis non tam in vultu relucere quam in oratione, quod hoc sit certissimum minimeque mendax animi speculum" ASD IV-4:214.
  - 21 Marie-Luce Demonet, *Les Voix du signe* (Paris, 1992) 253: "L'usage continuel des métaphores linguistiques dans ce texte [*Lingua*] ne doit pas conduire à imaginer qu'Erasmus fait oeuvre de linguiste. Il veut orienter les signes dans un sens moral et faire en sorte que l'âme chrétienne soit le miroir de la vérité évangélique."

identified with historical personages. The specular properties of such sayings ought to inhibit their circulation. Conversely, to circulate freely, they shouldn't belong to anyone. Folly can repeat what Socrates says because his words are not part of his inalienable identity. The self that inheres in his speech can be shared. Montaigne seems to exploit this paradox in his rewriting of Cicero's epistolary apophthegms, which may speak the reader's mind better than the writer's.

In effect, the apophthegm encourages a form of self-recognition in the reader, who sees himself in the speaker's self-portrait. This, I would like to suggest, is how Montaigne stands in relation to Cicero, and in particular in the essay on Vanity from book three, first published in 1588. "De la vanité" (III,9) is a long and errant meditation on travel, family, and the disintegration of the state under the pressures of civil war. The centrifugal force of civil war drives Montaigne from his property and his name, le Chateau de Montaigne, and it compromises his independence by forcing him to rely on his neighbors for his very survival. Under the circumstances, he knows what to flee but not what to seek: "je sçay bien ce que je fais, mais non pas ce que je cherche" (III,9,972). Renaissance compilers and their legion of readers, whose numbers have declined rather sharply in our day, would have had no trouble recognizing in this phrase a vernacular version of a formula first used by Cicero in his *Letters to Atticus*, in a brief missive from book 8 written during the civil war of 49 BC between Caesar and Pompey. To Atticus, who favors Pompey, the famously irresolute Cicero writes plaintively: "ego vero quem fugiam habeo, quem sequar non habeo" (*Ad Att.* 8.7.2). This "celebrated epigram," as Shackleton Bailey calls it,<sup>22</sup> was already famous in antiquity, perhaps even before the publication of the *Letters to Atticus*. In book six of his *Institutio oratoria*, Quintilian cites Cicero's line to Atticus in a chapter devoted to the rhetorical quality known as *urbanitas*. Though perhaps biased by his affection for the prince of Latin eloquence, Quintilian is amazed at Cicero's urbanity: "mira quaedam in eo videtur fuisse urbanitas" (6.3.3). So prolific was the Roman orator at witty sayings or *facete dicta* that his freedman Tiro made a collection of them in three books (6.3.5), which circulated sooner and perhaps more widely than the letters and speeches themselves. Later in the same chapter, Quintilian mentions a certain Domitius Marsus, who wrote a treatise on urbanity dividing the topic into three genres: *honorificum*, *contumeliosum*, and *medium*, which he also called in Greek ἀποφθεγματικόν (6.3.108–109). Since all three categories are exemplified by quotations from Cicero, Marsus' treatise, like Tiro's compilation before it, and Quintilian's chapter after it, may well have served as a collection of *apophthegmata Ciceroniana*. To exemplify the *genus contumeliosum* or vitupera-

22 Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, ed. D.R. Shackleton Bailey, vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1968) 334.

tive style of urbanity, Marsus quoted Cicero's complaint to Atticus: "habeo quem fugiam, quem sequar non habeo" (6.3.109). Quintilian's near contemporary Plutarch includes this saying in his collection *Apophthegmata regum et imperatorum* (*Moralia* 205C), and in late antiquity, Macrobius repeats the saying in a chapter of his *Saturnalia* devoted to Cicero's famous jokes. Unlike Quintilian, Macrobius quotes the line exactly as it is given in the manuscript tradition of Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*: "ego vero quem fugiam habeo, quem sequar non habeo" (*Saturnalia* 2.3.7). Erasmus collected the phrase in book four of his *Apophthegmata* as the fourteenth of seventy-one sayings attributed to Cicero, substituting the verb *scio* for *habeo*: "Quem fugiam scio, quem sequar nescio" (ASD IV-4:354). This is the version that Montaigne seems to have followed, after adjusting the relative pronouns to suit his own circumstances: "je sais ce que je fuis mais non pas ce que je cherche." He substitutes "ce que" or *what* for *quem* or *whom*, since his choice is not between two generals but rather between two factions or two political parties. So, when Montaigne doesn't know whom to follow, he follows Cicero.

Cicero can be understood from his own correspondence either as a hopeless prevaricator or as a model of independence, a non-aligned Roman who keeps his distance from either side in civil war. Either way, he sets an example for the narrator of "De la vanité," who sees himself in the mirror of the *Letters to Atticus*.<sup>23</sup> In the apophthegmatic tradition, Cicero is notorious for his inability to take sides and to commit himself to one course of action. Erasmus collects saying 14 from *Ad Atticum* 8.7 under the heading of neutrality or *Neutra pars placet* (ASD IV-4:354), and he repeats after Macrobius another anecdote which confirms Cicero's reputation for changing sides.

Julius Caesar appointed to the senate many men unworthy of that order and among them Laberius, who, from a Roman knight, became a stage actor. When Laberius passed in front of Cicero in the senate looking for a seat, Cicero told him, "I would have made room for you if it weren't so crowded," both to reject Laberius and to mock the new senate, whose number Caesar had inflated beyond all reason. Nor did Laberius take this insult sitting down. "I'm surprised," he answered, "you're crowded, since you usually sit on two seats," blaming Cicero for his unsteady allegiance, adhering now to one party, now to another.<sup>24</sup>

23 Earlier in the essay, as Richard Regosin points out in *The Matter of My Book* (Berkeley, 1977) 45, Montaigne has cited Cicero on the rejection of servitude and obligation (III,9,954) from the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 5.1.

24 Cicero 32. "C. Caesar multos in senatum legerat eo ordine indignos et in his Laberium ex equite Romano mimum. Hic quum in senatu M. Tullium praeteriret sedem quaerens,

In the theater, not as Erasmus has it in the Senate, Cicero refused a seat to the poet and actor Laberius, remarking ironically on Caesar's expansion of the Senate and thus of the number of spectators entitled to sit in the front rows of the theater: "Recepissem te, nisi anguste sederem."<sup>25</sup> One good *face-tia* deserves another, and so Laberius retorted: "Demiror si sedes anguste, qui soleas duabus sedere sellis." Long before he published his collection of *Apophthegmata* in 1531, Erasmus collected the saying *duabus sedere sellis* or "to sit on two seats" as adage 602, which may be germane to our comparison of Cicero and Montaigne. To sit on two seats is a sign, and hardly an honorific one, of opportunism or irresolution or what Erasmus calls in his anecdote about Cicero and Laberius *lubrica fides*, which we may label "slippery loyalty."<sup>26</sup> When he expanded his adage in 1515, Erasmus added an allusion to the laws of Solon, which punished any citizen who maintained neutrality in times of *stasis* or factional dispute.<sup>27</sup> One source for Solon's law is a letter which Cicero sent to Atticus later in the Spring of 49 when he still couldn't make up his mind between Pompey and Caesar. Cicero acknowledges his violation of Solon's law, while nodding to his correspondent's residence in Athens, making him Solon's compatriot or *popularis*: "ego vero Solonis, popularis tui, legem neglegam, qui capite sanxit si qui in seditione non alterius utrius partis fuisset" (*Ad Atticum* 10.1.2). The Latin *seditio* renders the Greek *στάσις*. Unless Atticus advises him otherwise, he will continue to waver: "nisi si tu aliter censes, et hinc abero et illum" (*Ad Atticum* 10.1.2). Montaigne may well have empathized with this vacillation in the midst of French *stasis*.

While Cicero sits on two seats, Montaigne has the impression of sitting between two seats. In a minor essay "On vain subtleties" (1,54), Montaigne

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'Recepissem' inquit Cicero 'te, nisi anguste sederem', simul et illum respuens et in novum senatum iocatus, cuius numerum Caesar supra quam phas erat auxerat. Nec hoc dictorium inultum tulit Laberius: 'Demiror' inquit 'si sedes anguste, qui soleas duabus sedere sellis', obiiciens illi levitatem, quod lubricae fidei nunc his nunc illis partibus adhaereret" ASD IV-4:358.

25 J. Schwartz, "Sur quelques anecdotes concernant César et Cicéron," *Revue des Études Anciennes* 50 (1948) 264–271 points out the incoherence of the anecdote as recounted both in Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.3.10 and Seneca Rhetor, *Controversiae* 7.3.9. Laberius would have been looking for a seat *in equestria* among the knights while Cicero was seated in the orchestra with the other senators. In any event, we can't expect strict logic from a joke.

26 The expression *lubrica fides* reappears in adage 2584 *Utroque nutans sententia* as an image of unsteady political allegiance, with an example from Homer's *Iliad* (ASD II-6:383).

27 "At Solon legem tulit qua punirentur hi qui in civitatis tumultu neutri partium adhaesisent" ASD II-2:129.

reports a sort of parlor game he played with his friends where they tried to identify all the cases where opposites meet. The title "Sire" goes either to the king or the commoner, but to no one in between. The game of dice is allowed at the prince's table or the tavern, but not at any socially intermediary site. Extreme cold like extreme heat can cause burns. Finally, in a more epistemological vein, the very simple and the very learned are "honnestes gens" but not the people in between, "le cul entre deux selles," which includes the essayist (I,54,313). Montaigne's predicament, sitting between two seats, is more than an epistemological one, caught between primitive ignorance and learned ignorance; it is preeminently political. The middle class, as it were, benefiting neither from simplicity nor wisdom, is the one most disposed to rebellion, reformation, and faction. "Ceux icy," Montaigne warns us, "troublent le monde" (I,54,313). That is why he tries to return to simplicity and evacuate the middle ground. Yet, at the same time, intermediary status, in Montaigne's figure of speech, is non-partisan, for in the commonplace tradition, the two seats or "deux selles" represent two opposing political factions. Montaigne's image of "le cul entre deux selles" adapts the adage *duabus sedere sellis* to his own neutrality. Like Cicero, he is reluctant to choose between what "De la vanité" calls "deux pars de choix douteux et difficile" (994) or two lawless factions in civil war. It is true that in "De la vanité," Montaigne claims that he would not have hesitated had he been in Cicero's position: "Entre Cesar et Pompeius je me fusse franchement déclaré" (III,9,994), but he is not between Caesar and Pompey. His decisiveness is counterfactual. Between the Protestants and the Catholic League, he does not know where to sit. He wants to remain independent, regardless of Solon's edict, and so, like Cicero, he wavers *et hinc et illim*.

Moreover, he seems to share with Cicero a similar sense of the loss of self. In the same letter to Atticus where he doesn't know whom to follow, Cicero says that he cannot bear to see the triumph of Julius Caesar, the man who has cost him his very self: "nec ista videre possum, quae numquam timui ne viderem, nec mehercule istum, propter quem mihi non modo meis sed memet ipso carendum est" (*Ad Atticum* 8.7.2). In "De la vanité," a few pages before his usurpation of Cicero's apophthegm, the narrator declares, "Je n'ay rien mien que moy" (I have nothing but myself; myself is the only thing that is truly mine); but he adds: "et si en est la possession en partie manque et empruntée" (III,9,968). Even his self is not really his: it is borrowed and defective. One of his creditors is the aphoristic author of the *Letters to Atticus*.

## Conclusion: Emptying the Well

One of the more loyal successors to Erasmus in the paroemiographic tradition of the Renaissance was the Dutch doctor, poet, and schoolmaster Adriaan de Jonge, who went by the name of Hadrianus Junius. Among his many achievements as a humanist is his proverb collection *Adagiorum centuriae octo cum dimidia*, which was first published in 1558, a generation after Erasmus' death. Junius is a convenient figure with whom to conclude our study, since the prefatory epistle in which he dedicates his collection to Prince Maximilian, but which is really conceived as a tribute to Erasmus, can serve as an epitome of the whole range of metaphors which we have examined singly in the preceding chapters. Before he gets around to flattering his princely benefactor, Junius effusively acknowledges his debt to Erasmus' masterpiece, the *Adagiorum Chiliades*. Without in any way detracting from the celebrity of that august model, and wondering that others have the audacity to challenge its paroemiographic prerogative, Junius nevertheless cannot help noticing that several proverbs are missing from the never sufficiently praised *Chiliades* (such is the press of ancient authors coming to light every day). Therefore, he humbly proposes to follow Erasmus, though at a distance, and to serve as his substitute or reserve.<sup>1</sup>

At this point in his preliminary remarks, the author enters a dense thicket of metaphors that can only be traversed by dint of patience and determination:

Therefore, having conceived in my mind a certain Herculean confidence and making my way through the thickest forest of writers of every kind,

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1 "Desiderium Erasmum optime de omnibus meritum primosque palmae honores adeptum, sequendum esse mihi duxi . . . Itaque quum animadvertissem nihil utilius exisse Adagiorum lectione, quum ad intelligendos difficiles et inexplicitos autorum nodos, tum ad exornanda nostra ipsorum et dicta et scripta: viderem autem plurima (uti fit tanta tamque multiplici autorum quotidie in lucem emergentium sylva) desiderari hac in parte in praeclaro illo nec umquam satis laudato Chiliadum opere, visus sum mihi aliquod operae pretium facturum si Erasmo nostro, cui primam huius gloriae in edendis Adagiis praerogativam invidere atque intercipere temerario ausu tentarunt nonnulli, succedere, quamvis longo intervallo, et reipsa succenturiari insisterem." Hadrianus Junius, *Adagiorum centuriae octo cum dimidia* (Basel, 1558) a 2 v°. The parenthetical reference to the *autorum quotidie in lucem emergentium sylva* may in fact be a reminiscence of Erasmus' dedicatory epistle to the 1515 edition of the *Chiliades* (ep. 269), where he justifies the constant revision of his work on the basis that new remains of the ancients are coming to light every day: "praesertim emergentibus indies in lucem novis veterum monumentis" Allen 1:522.

through gem-studded gardens, through labyrinths guided by a sort of Ariadne's thread, I began to survey everything in all directions, to open the shells, to trim the shoots, to break off little branches, to pull up the new roots in the way, to collect flowers, some of which had not been ignored but only roughly cleared of splinters, and finally to leave out nothing that would be suited to building up a heap and amassing a glean-ing. Having reviewed my work and seeing over eight hundred shoots, stems, and flowers of all kinds heaped up before me, I began to arrange them all like Erasmus not under topical headings but in eight centuries plus a corollary and, to continue the metaphor, some new buds. I began to adorn the plain and colorless with the pigment of varied reading, to smooth out the rough, to clarify the obscure, to heal what was ill, and to bring the dead back to life.<sup>2</sup>

Assuming the mantle of the new Hercules or new Erasmus, Junius explores the *sylva* or chaos of material bequeathed by the paroemiographic tradition. The figure of the *densissima sylva* introduces a whole litany of natural or organic metaphors including the *hortos gemmantes*, which echoes the Erasmian notion of the gem in its setting, the labyrinth, once an adage and now a figure for paroemiography itself, the *cortex* or outer layer of meaning that the exegete must peel off to reveal the inner lesson, the branches, roots, and ubiquitous *flores* that play such a prominent role in the poetics of commonplace culture, the *spicilegium* or gleaning that describes the belated efforts of the humanist, and the *acervus* or heap of raw material that leads us back to chaos via Ovid's "caecus acervus" or blind heap (*Metamorphoses* 1.24). Indeed, the author now conceives of himself as the new Aesculapius, bringing the dead back to life like Angelo Poliziano and Konrad Gesner before him.

There is one image in this overgrown passage that merits further scrutiny for its allusive potential. Among the many horticultural tasks confronting the paroemiographer is the need to break off little branches in the forest of

2 "Quapropter concepta animo Herculea quadam fiducia, per densissimas scriptorum omnis generis sylvas, per hortos gemmantes, per Labyrinthos quoque ceu Ariadnaei cuiusdam fili ductu, gradiens incepti undecunque perlustrare omnia, cortices recludere, propagines putare, ramulos defringere, viriradices obvias vellere, flores colligere, non praeteritis etiam delibratis ruditer assulis nonnullis, denique nihil omittere quod instruendo acervo et cumulando spicilegio accommodum foret. Quo demum recensito supra octingentos omnis generis stolones, stirpes, floresque acervatos videns, coepi ea universa Erasmi exemplo non in classes sed in centurias octo non sine corollario ac (ut in metaphora persistam) ἐπιβλάσθησει τινί digerere, nuda et informia multiplicis lectionis pigmentis exornare, rudia laevigare, obscura illustrare, putria sanare, mortua vitalibus adhibitibus succis ad vitam revocare." azv<sup>o</sup>



literary tradition, which Junius expresses as “ramulos defringere.” Apart from its more mundane meanings as a compound of *frangere* or to break, the verb *defringere* evokes a jurisprudential context and is attested in Roman civil law, in the *Institutiones* of the second-century jurist Gaius, where it means to break off a piece of property in dispute and bring it to court in order to make a claim to ownership.<sup>3</sup> Cicero uses the same verb metaphorically in his *De oratore* in order to represent a disputed claim of intellectual property between rhetoricians and philosophers. The former stake their claim to the division between thesis and hypothesis, introduced by the philosophers, not “iure aut iudicio” but rather “ut surculo defringendo” or, as it were, by usurpation (*De oratore* 3.110).<sup>4</sup> If Junius meant to echo Cicero’s *surculo defringendo* with his own *ramulos defringere*, he may have had in mind the litigious nature of commonplace culture and the great difficulty of establishing ownership over pieces of tradition that circulate so freely. In that case, he has staked his claim to a disputed inheritance, but only allusively and inconspicuously. In this way, the figure of the *silva* branches off in quite a different direction, toward questions of intellectual property rights, which have been treated more than adequately by other scholars.<sup>5</sup>

When he has finally extricated himself from his horticultural metaphors, Junius salutes his patron Maximilian as the most learned of princes, a veritable living library or “animata quaedam bibliotheca.” Here the library becomes a panegyric topos linking author and patron in a community of erudition before assuming its place in Junius’ collection as adage 602 *Bibliotheca animata*, derived from Eunapius’ *Lives of the Sophists*, which Junius edited at the end of his career. Eunapius calls the sophist Longinus, not the Longinus associated with the *Peri hypsous*, a sort of living library and walking museum: βιβλιοθήκη τις ἔμψυχος καὶ περιπατοῦν μουσεῖον.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, adds the fourth-century biographer, many of his books still circulate (*Lives of the Sophists* 456). What still

3 “Si qua res talis erat, ut sine incommodo non posset in ius adferri vel adduci, verbigratia si columna aut navis esset, pars aliqua inde sumebatur ea que in ius adferebatur, deinde in eam partem quasi in totam rem praesentem fiebat vindictio . . . ex nave vero et columna aliqua pars defringebatur.” Gaius, *Institutiones* 4.17, ed Seckel and Kuebler (Leipzig, 1908).

4 I follow the interpretation offered by Wisse, Winterbottom, and Fantham in their commentary on the *De oratore*, vol. 5 (Heidelberg, 2008) 39–73. Erasmus interprets the saying *surculum defringere* to mean to borrow from another discipline, as a jurist will borrow a saying or a principle from theology (ASD II-8:327).

5 See Kathy Eden, *Friends Hold All Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the Adages of Erasmus* (New Haven, 2001).

6 For this topos, see Yun Lee Too, “The Walking Library” in *Athenaeus and his World*, eds. David Braund and John Wilkins (Exeter, 2000) 111–123.

circulates in the Renaissance, thanks to Junius and others, is the ideal of circulation or of mobile culture. It is only natural that a figure of mobility, like Longinus the walking library, should circulate in a collection of commonplaces such as the *Adagiorum centuriae*. The proverbial Longinus is no longer an historical personage but a scholarly ideal and a figure of speech easily transferred to new discursive contexts.

By including the adage *Bibliotheca animata* in his collection, Junius fills a modest lacuna in the *Chiliades* and sets an irresistible example for subsequent readers of Erasmus, who are keen to identify missing adages. We have already seen how Marc Antoine Muret faults Erasmus for ignoring the dance around the well in a chapter from the *Variae Lectiones* written in response to the 1575, Florence edition of Erasmus' *Adages*. He also faults the editors for including too many entries that are not proverbs at all. He suggests that they excise the non-proverbs and substitute for them the missing proverbs. As it is, whoever is responsible for this shoddy work attracts criticism like the North wind draws the clouds: "ille igitur ἔλξας ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν, ὡς ὁ καικίας, νέφη omnes omnium reprehensiones in caput suum traxit."<sup>7</sup> The Greek phrase is a variant of a proverb which is cited by Aristotle in the *Meteorologica* (364b13) and again by Aulus Gellius in the *Noctes Atticae* (2.22) and duly reported by Erasmus in adage 462 with the Latin title *mala attrahens ad sese ut caecias nubes*. Rabelais cites the proverb in the vernacular in *Gargantua* 40 to account for the bad reputation of monks, who attract censure "tout ainsi comme le vent dict Cecias attire les nues" (110). In the light of Rabelais, Muret seems to liken the editor of the expurgated edition to a monk or at least to denounce him as an object of universal reprobation.

Other humanists were more gracious in their assessment of Erasmian paroemiology, and we can all subscribe to the sentiment with which the French Renaissance humanist and legal scholar André Tiraqueau introduced his own catalogue of the proverbs which Erasmus skipped: "Sed quis omnia posset?" (but who can do everything?).<sup>8</sup> Tiraqueau strikes this conciliatory tone in his vast commentary on the eccentric miscellany known as the *Geniales dies* by

7 Muret, *Opera omnia*, 3:279. The standard reading is ἔλκων ἐφ' αὐτὸν ὥστε καικίας νέφος. Delio Cantimori understood this passage as a vindication of Erasmus, a way to insinuate that Erasmus has unduly attracted all the censure due to his editors: "Mureto... conclude che l'effetto dell'edizione è di fare attribuire tutti gli errori ad Erasmo." See Cantimori, "Note su Erasmo" in *Gedenkschrift zum 400 Todestage des Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Basel, 1936) 104. His reading is a salutary corrective to my own emphasis on Muret's antagonism toward Erasmus.

8 André Tiraqueau, *Semestria in genialium dierum Alexandri ab Alexandro libros sex* (Lyon, 1586) 694.

Alexander ab Alexandro, who devotes book five, chapter fifteen to a list of proverbs, including the ubiquitous *mala ad se trahens, ut caecias nubes*.<sup>9</sup> In his commentary on Alexander's proverbs, Tiraqueau duly notes the corresponding adages in Erasmus, and where there is no Erasmian precedent, he insinuates the illegitimacy of the saying. For instance, at the lemma *Catone constantior*, which is a fine example of the use of hyperbole in adages, we read the following commentary: "Id proverbium non extat apud Erasmus: nec scio an fuerit a quopiam antiquorum usurpatum" (this proverb cannot be found in Erasmus, and I am not sure whether it was used by any of the ancients).<sup>10</sup> Having identified Alexander's sources, the commentator cannot resist the temptation to offer his own list of precisely 19 proverbs that escaped Erasmus' attention, being careful to add that had Erasmus lived, he would have increased his collection *in infinitum*. Following such illustrious models, *quamvis longo intervallo*, I propose to retrieve another missing adage, which can serve as a pendant to *Dancing around the well*.

In the correspondence of Basil of Caesarea, well known to the author of the *Adages*, we can find the following insight into hydraulic maintenance: τὰ φρέατὰ φασιν ἀντλούμενα βέλτιω γίνεσθαι or wells, so they say, run better when drained.<sup>11</sup> Clement of Alexandria cites this saying as the first half of a double proverb in the *Stromata* (1.1.12), where he promotes the value of education. Wells run cleaner when emptied, but their water is spoiled if no one draws on them; and use keeps the iron pure while idleness breeds rust. Curiously, Erasmus omits this edifying figure of speech not only from the *Adagiorum Chiliades* but also, as far as I can tell, from his educational treatises, where it would have been in its element. Naturally, I owe my information to a Renaissance compiler, in this case Junius himself, whose own *Centuries* of proverbs are usually poured into posthumous editions of Erasmus' adages.<sup>12</sup> Following Clement, Junius offers a pedagogical gloss on his adage, arguing that the mind of youth is more excellent the more you exercise and cultivate it: "et ingenium adolescentis quo magis

9 Alexandri ab Alexandro *Genialium dierum libri sex varia ac recondita eruditione referti* (Paris, 1532) 141v°.

10 Tiraqueau 692. In the *Prolegomena* we do find *Catone severior* (ASD II-1:80), which refers presumably to Cato the Elder, while *Catone constantior* must allude to the Stoic constancy of Cato Uticensis.

11 St. Basil, *Letters* The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA, 1930) 372. Erasmus cites Basil as a connoisseur of proverbs in the dedicatory epistle of the *Collectanea* (ASD II-9:40).

12 For instance, *Erasmi Adagiorum Chiliades* (Basel, 1574), where Junius does not even appear on the title page. Just a drop in the bucket, we might say.

excolas exerceasque hoc sit praestantius.”<sup>13</sup> The well is a figure for human *ingenium*: the more you draw on it, the better it flows. The more you take, the more it yields. By an easy metonymy, the well is also a figure of the source, in the sense of the literary model. To renew the source, you have to exhaust it: *puteus exhaustus melior evadit*. The challenge for Renaissance humanism is that the sources refuse to be emptied: they are inexhaustible.

We have already encountered an apt figure for the curse of inexhaustible tradition in the labor of the Danaids, who are condemned for having killed their husbands to pour water endlessly into a leaky vessel that can never be filled. Though he may be a little short on wells, Erasmus did not miss the proverbial *πίθος* or jar of the Danaids, which inspires adage 933 *Inexplebile dolium*, whose commentary draws from a wide variety of classical sources without ever getting to the bottom of this inexhaustible figure. From Erasmus, the *pithos* circulates to Rabelais’ *Tiers Livre* and Montaigne’s essay on education, “De l’institution des enfans,” where the author, as we have seen, claims to reenact the labor of the Danaids, perhaps as an ironic variation on the pedagogical ideal of the *puteus exhaustus*.<sup>14</sup> As they draw and pour, but never stop, the Danaids provide a model for the circulation of commonplaces in Renaissance humanism and a warning to anyone rash enough to chronicle such a ceaseless labor. The process can be glimpsed but not surveyed; the topic can be sampled but never exhausted. Every book has to come to an end.

This one ends at the well. Erasmus did not omit Plutarch’s proverb *Dancing around the well*, as Muret claims, but rather included it, somewhat surreptitiously, in another proverb on wells. Muret did not realize that Erasmus beat him to the saying *τὴν περὶ τὸ φρέαρ ὄρχησιν ὀρχεῖσθαι*, because it does not appear on any of the indices that Erasmus or his modern editors have compiled for the adages, either in Greek or Latin. The saying appears in adage 1176 *lupus circum puteum chorum agit*. The image of the wolf who goes around the well, presumably because it is thirsty but cannot drink, offers an interesting counter-paradigm for the process of cultural transmission that I have been tracing here. Whereas Plutarch’s dance around the well suggests the danger of immersion, this new well is the site of exclusion. The wolf goes around because he cannot get in. Circulation is the path of dissatisfaction. Erasmus explains that the wolf going around the well is a figure of false hope and wasted effort: “in eos dicetur qui sumpta inaniter opera spe sua frustrantur” (ASD II-3:190). The wolf, like the humanist, is insatiable, and they both come back to the well, for they know that the commonplace tradition never runs dry.

13 Junius, *Adagiorum centuriae*, adage 319 *Puteus si hauriatur, melior evadit*.

14 See above chapter four *in fine*.

*Ogni medaglia ha il suo verso*, as Montaigne reminds us in “Des boyteux” (III,11),<sup>15</sup> and for every proverb there seems to be a counter proverb. If the wolf cannot enter the well, let alone empty it, then some people, as the English language has it, can go to the well once too often. In part one of Cervantes’ novel, Don Quijote warns his squire Sancho Panza not to push his luck, since the pitcher can go to the well once too often: “Tantas veces va el cantarillo a la fuente, y no digo mas” (I,30,376). In French, the saying is “tant va la cruche à l’eau, qu’à la fin elle se casse.” Of course, this salutary advice is wasted on Sancho, who is incorrigible in every respect, and especially in his affection for proverbs or *refranes*. This little exchange between knight and squire, who share a penchant for proverbial speech, epitomizes the risk and the allure of repetition, which ensures the circulation of commonplaces in Renaissance humanism.

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15 Montaigne, *Essais* 1035. The standard form of the proverb is *ogni medaglia ha il suo rovescio*.

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